

THE THING IN GRANDMA'S CLOSET

A Play for Family Audiences

by

Jonathan Graham

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The Thing in Grandma's Closet was first produced by Pollyanna Theatre Company in Austin TX at the Long Center for the Performing Arts' Rollins Studio Theatre in January and February 2017. The cast and crew were as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>ALLY:</u> | Uyen-Anh Dang |
| <u>NICK:</u> | Chase Brewer |
| <u>MEG:</u> | Jessica Hughes |
| <u>MILLIE:</u> | Bethany Harbaugh |
| | |
| <u>DIRECTOR:</u> | Judy Matetzschk-Campbell |
| <u>STAGE MANAGER:</u> | Andrew Perry |
| <u>SCENIC DESIGNER:</u> | Chase Staggs |
| <u>COSTUME DESIGNER:</u> | Rikki Tomiko Davis |
| <u>LIGHTING DESIGNER:</u> | Don Day |
| <u>SOUND DESIGNER:</u> | Andrew Perry |
| <u>PROP DESIGNER:</u> | Joanna Casey |

Cast of Characters

ALLY: a young girl (NICK's sister) about 13

NICK: a young boy (ALLY's brother) about 10

MEG: ALLY and NICK's mom, 40s

MILLIE: ALLY and NICK's grandma, MEG's mom, various ages from 13 to late 70s

Scene

A room in Grandma's house.

Time

Now and in memory.

SETTING: A unit set suggests a room, mostly empty. There are a few moving boxes and an old trunk. The most striking feature is a door to somewhere or something.

AT RISE: NICK, his sister ALLY, and their mother, MEG, are there. They are dressed for a funeral and have just come from one. Each has a present to open.

MEG
Who wants to go first?

(The kids are noticeably not excited about opening presents.)

NICK
You can, mom.

MEG
Ally?

ALLY
Are these really from grandma?

MEG
Of course.

NICK
Because it just seems weird. Since she's dead.

MEG
Honey, she wanted us to have these things.

ALLY
So this isn't some guilt gift? Like: "Sorry grandma's dead. Here's a gift card."

MEG
No!

NICK
Good.

ALLY

Because that would be like...

NICK

Creepy.

MEG

She left these things with Aunt Doris to give to us.

NICK

But I thought she died of a heart attack?

MEG

That's right.

ALLY

She like just fell over or something. But first she wrapped some presents?

MEG

Not right before. Aunt Doris said that a month or so ago, Grandma showed her these things, and said that if anything ever happened to her, that these things were for us.

ALLY

That's so weird.

NICK

I think it's cool.

ALLY

You would.

MEG

How about if we open them. You first, Ally.

(ALLY's is a small box. She starts to open it.)

ALLY

What do you think it is?

MEG

Small box like that... could be jewelry.

ALLY

Better not be a dead animal specimen. Remember that drawer of stuffed mice and squirrels and birds she had at her school.

NICK

Awesome!

MEG

How could I forget that?

NICK

Why didn't I get to see that?

ALLY

You just don't remember because you were, like, two or something.

MEG

How about if you just open it.

(She does. It is a large and ornate key.)

ALLY

A key. Wow.

MEG

That's kind of neat. You could put it on a necklace like a pendant.

ALLY

I guess.

(She puts the key her pocket.)

Who's next?

NICK

I'll go.

(He opens a rectangular package, about the size of a magazine. Inside is folded paper, which he unfolds in a large sheet covered with numbered technical drawings, like the plans for something, or directions for assembly.)

NICK (Cont.)

Cool!

MEG

Huh. You could hang that on your wall or something. Like a poster.

NICK

But it's like directions for putting something together. Was there another box for me?

MEG

No, just the one.

ALLY

You mean we didn't all get random keys?

MEG

Be nice.

NICK

Why would she give me directions without the thing they're directions for?

MEG

I'm not sure, honey.

ALLY

Because she was... you know.

NICK

What?

ALLY

I loved her and everything. She was awesome. But you have to admit, Grandma was kind of weird.

NICK

That's mean.

ALLY

It's true.

NICK

Open yours, mom.

(She does. Hers is large and flat. It is a frame with several photos matted in it.)

MEG

Look at these photos! Here's her wedding day. And in this one, she must've been about your age, Ally.

ALLY

She looks older than me.

MEG

Probably because they dressed up more back then.

NICK

Look—there's one when we were little.

MEG

And she dated each one, that's nice.

ALLY

So it's a bunch of random photos in a frame.

NICK

Not totally random. There's a fourth of July one and that's last Thanksgiving.

MEG

And then there's this recent one.

NICK

Let me see.

MEG

I don't even remember when it was taken.

ALLY

And it's the only one that doesn't have a date.

NICK

But it's the three of us with Grandma.

ALLY

Like I said. Weird.

MEG

She must've gotten confused about the dates.

NICK

I do that sometimes. I have trouble remembering if nine is August or September.

ALLY

That's because you're a dork.

MEG

Sometimes older people get forgetful.

ALLY

You mean like Alzheimer's?

MEG

Not necessarily.

NICK

What's Alz... whatever you said?

ALLY

It's disease where old people forget people's names and swear a lot. Kinda of like that baseball coach you had last year. Except they have an excuse.

MEG

Ally, that is not true!

NICK

Did Grandma's have it?

MEG

No! She just got a little confused sometimes. Like lots of people. Which is no reason to make fun of them, Ally.

ALLY

Whatever.

MEG

Anyway, I think it's nice. To have these photos.

ALLY

Random photos.

MEG

It's a beautiful frame.

ALLY

And look, it has a wire on the back, so you could put it on a necklace. Like a pendant.

(MEG chooses to ignore her daughter's remark. She puts frame down.)

MEG

I need you guys to clear out this room, OK? Boxes go out to the dumpster, but if you find something small that you want to keep, you can put it in the trunk. I've got to finish cleaning the kitchen.

ALLY

Can I borrow your iPad?

MEG

Sure, but there's not much you can do with it.

ALLY

What do you mean?

MEG

We canceled grandma's Internet service.

ALLY

Grandma's dead and there's no wireless. How depressing!

MEG

Ally...

ALLY

I don't want to be here! I just want to go home and see my friends and go to Caitlin's birthday party.

NICK

And play spin-the-bottle with Jason Anderson.

ALLY

Shut up!

MEG

Both of you need to cool it.

ALLY

You don't even know what spin-the-bottle is.

NICK

Sure I do.

(NICK mimes kissing and hugging. ALLY goes for Him like she's going to throttle Him.)

MEG

Kids!

(They freeze.)

Enough. Please.

(NICK and ALLY turn away from one another. ALLY sits in the chair. NICK flops on the floor.)

This is a hard day for everybody. But I need you to help me out. You need to behave yourselves and not tear one another limb from limb.

NICK

OK.

MEG

Ally?

ALLY

Whatever.

MEG

(ignoring this comment)

Oh, and make sure you clean out the closet, too. If there's anything that worth saving, you can take it out to the U-Haul. Dad's taking some furniture over to Goodwill. We have to empty out the house by first thing tomorrow morning so it's ready for the new people to move in.

ALLY

And then can I go to Caitlin's party?

MEG

If we're done by mid-afternoon, there's no reason we can't be home in time for the party.

ALLY

Yes!

NICK

I thought we were going to be here all day.

ALLY

Why would you want to be here all day?

NICK

I just... wanted to see if I could find whatever it is these are the directions for.

ALLY

You are such a dork.

MEG

Kids! Please. Give it a rest.

(MEG leaves. ALLY takes a box and carries it out. NICK is looking through stuff in the trunk, but not carrying anything out. ALLY returns.)

ALLY

You're trying to make me miss the party.

NICK

No, I'm not.

ALLY

You know it's important to me, so you go out of your way to—

NICK

That's not true. I just... like looking at stuff.

ALLY

Whatever.

(She picks up another box and trudges off. NICK flips through a photo album. Then she returns.)

NICK

(indicating a picture)

Why did people used to dress like that?

ALLY

No Facebook, so people weren't afraid of being tagged in embarrassing photos forever. Now help me.

NICK

Mom and I did the whole kitchen while you texted with your boyfriend.

ALLY

Number one, he's not my boyfriend. And number two, Dad and I cleared out the garage and the living room.

NICK

OK, I'll help. But we should keep this trunk. It's like her whole life is in here! And look at this photo album. Here's a picture of you when you were a baby.

ALLY

Let me see.

(They look together.)

ALLY

I was a very cute baby.

NICK

And a fat one.

ALLY

Babies are supposed to be fat. And look, you weren't exactly skinny.

NICK

Why would she put in a picture of me crying?

ALLY

I think it's cute... how pink you got.

NICK

There are no pictures of anyone else crying.

ALLY

It's adorable. Your mouth open like that?

NICK

But look at the date- crying on my birthday?

ALLY

Yeah. You were crying because you hated cake.

NICK

No, I didn't.

ALLY

Um, I was there. You hated it.

NICK

That's so weird.

ALLY

Not as weird as having birthday pudding.

NICK

What's birthday pudding?

ALLY

It's pudding. On your birthday. Now come on and help me with the boxes.

(They start carrying out boxes.)

ALLY

I think that one goes straight in the trash.

(They each carry out a box,
then return.)

NICK

Look! This one's all test tubes and beakers.

ALLY

I think Dad was going to donate those to the school where Grandma used to teach.

NICK

I wish I could keep them.

ALLY

You've already got a ton of that stuff.

NICK

That doesn't mean I don't want more.

ALLY

Dork.

(They leave again,
struggling with the weight
of boxes. They repeat this
a couple of times until the
stage is empty, except for
the trunk and the closet
door.)

NICK

Thank God that's all!

ALLY

We've still got to do the closet.

(She opens the closet, and
some pieces of machinery
tumble out.)

NICK

Wow!

ALLY

What is all this stuff?

NICK

I don't know, but isn't it awesome.

ALLY

It looks like a lot to carry.

NICK

(Picking up pieces and
trying to figure out how
they fit together)

What do you think it is?

ALLY

Probably one of grandma's famous "inventions."

(NICK pulls out something
big and bulky from the back

of the closet. It looks a little like some sort of boat and has a couple of bench seats attached.)

NICK

I love how she could take something ordinary and was turning it into something super-awesome!

ALLY

Hope it turns out better than that vacuum cleaner that she tried to turn into a bubble machine.

NICK

That was amazing.

ALLY

It was amazing she didn't set the deck on fire!

NICK

You sound just like mom.

(NICK starts trying to put it together. There is an instrument panel with gauges, dials, and levers. There are wires hanging underneath.)

ALLY

Maybe I should go get Dad.

NICK

No! Look!

(unfolding his gift from earlier)

I think this is what the directions are for.

(He puts a couple of parts together.)

ALLY

OK, that is kind of cool.

(watching her brother work with the tiniest bit of respect)

Don't you need tools or something?

NICK

I've got my Swiss Army knife.

(Using the knife's
screwdriver, NICK begins to
install the instrument
panel.)

ALLY

What do think it's supposed to be?

NICK

I dunno. Some kind of boat, maybe.

ALLY

I'm not taking that on the water.

NICK

If you're a scientist, sometimes you have to try a bunch of
things before you get it right.

ALLY

That's what Grandma used to say.

NICK

She said it because it's true. How about all those
experiments she used to do with us? Like blowing up gummy
bears or making instant ice cream with liquid nitrogen.

(ALLY reluctantly begins to
help NICK.)

ALLY

(holding up a random part)
Where do you think this goes?

NICK

I dunno. Let's look at the directions.
(They do.)
Maybe this?

ALLY

No, that's too big I think.
(beat)
Wait, I see.
(She flips it over.)
I was holding it upside down!

NICK

Oh, yeah. So it goes-

ALLY

Right on the back.

(She helps him put the part on.)

NICK

Thanks, sis.

ALLY

No problem.

(The contraption is complete, and it looks pretty cool, but a bit makeshift, too. It's like something you might see at a maker fair.)

ALLY

So what does it do?

NICK

That's what we've got to figure out.

(NICK is looking in the closet to see if they've missed anything while ALLY sits on the contraption pushing random buttons.)

ALLY

It's probably something she didn't have a chance to finish. I mean, you saw all that random junk in her garage.

NICK

But this isn't random. I mean, I got the directions.

ALLY

Yeah, that's true.

NICK

And you got the key!

(She tries the key. It fits.)

ALLY

I get to drive. Get in the back, buster.

(NICK backs up, and ALLY sits in front of him. ALLY puts the key in the slot and turns it. The machine rumbles to life. Lights flash. Things whirr and chirp and beep and honk.)

ALLY

Maybe we better turn it off.

NICK

No way.

ALLY

But we could break it.

NICK

We're not going to break it.

ALLY

That's what you said about grandpa's old radio.

NICK

I know I broke it, but then I fixed it.

ALLY

But that was a simple radio. What if this thing ruined the carpet, or scratched the wall, or caught on fire?

NICK

What if we just had fun?

(pause)

And don't you wonder what it's doing in grandma's closet?

(ALLY glares at him for a minute, then softens.)

ALLY

OK. But if it ends up blowing up the house, I'm blaming you.

NICK

Hey, you're the driver.

ALLY

So what do we do now, just push this big button that says "go?"

NICK

I guess so.

(ALLY pushes the button.
Nothing happens.)

ALLY

Oh, well. It was worth a try.

NICK

No, look! A light is flashing. See?

ALLY

It says enter a date.

NICK

How about today's date?

(She enters it and pushes a
button. Lights flash, and
the contraption makes an
obnoxious noise.)

ALLY

That was rude!

NICK

Look, the screen says, "That date is not in our system."

ALLY

(typing a date)
July 4th, 1776.

(She presses a button. The
obnoxious noise is heard
again.)

NICK

"That date is not in our system."

ALLY

(typing a date)

I'm trying my birthday.

(She presses a button. The machine plays the first few notes of "Happy Birthday," followed by the obnoxious noise.)

ALLY

What did I do to deserve that?

NICK

You were born, I guess.

(ALLY takes a swipe at NICK, but he avoids her. They think for a minute, then ALLY has an idea.)

ALLY

Does it say anything on your directions?

NICK

No. I wonder why we have to enter dates in the first place?

ALLY

If she meant for us to have this, probably she left us a hint. Like when she would help us with our homework, she wouldn't give us the answer, she'd give us a clue.

NICK

The problem is, she's not here to give us a clue.

ALLY

Obviously she knew she wouldn't be here to help after she died. So if grandma couldn't give us a clue herself, what would she do?

NICK

Give it to mom, probably.

ALLY

(something dawns on her)

That's it! You got the directions, I got the key...

NICK

And Mom got the pictures.

(They study the photos
together.)

ALLY

And every photo has a date!

NICK

Let's try one and see what happens,

ALLY

October 7, 1950.

NICK

What happened then?

ALLY

It was her thirteenth birthday.

NICK

(looking at a picture)

Oh, wow.

ALLY

I know, right? So let's try it.

NICK

October 7, 1950.

(NICK enters the date,
turns the key and pushes a
button. Lights flash.
Things bleep and honk. The
contraption spins. MILLIE
is there, wearing a party
dress. From the the trunk,
she retrieves a sign
reading "Happy Birthday,"
and hangs it on the door.
The contraption comes to a
halt. Lights shift. NICK
and ALLY are in another
time and place, but MILLIE
appears not to notice them.
MILLIE opens the door to

what used to be the closet and finds a birthday cake with lit candles. Off stage voices begin to sing "Happy Birthday," as MILLIE basks in the glow of the candles. She blows out the candles and the door closes. NICK and ALLY climb off the contraption and look around. We hear murmurs of conversation and even laughter.)

NICK

Where are we, Ally?

ALLY

I think it's a birthday party.

NICK

But aren't we still in Grandma's house.

ALLY

I think so.

NICK

Well, if it's a party, I better get us some cake!

ALLY

Nick, wait-

(But he's gone. ALLY peers off nervously, toward the party. She wants to hide, but there's nowhere to go. MILLIE returns, through the door. She is thirteen, and now visibly upset. She is surprised to see ALLY.)

ALLY

Hi!

MILLIE

Hello. What are you doing back here?

ALLY

Oh, we just got here. My brother and me.

MILLIE

Well, welcome. I'm Millie.

ALLY

Hi, I'm Allison. But people call me Ally. It's nice to meet you.

MILLIE

I'm the birthday girl.

ALLY

Happy birthday!

MILLIE

Thank you. I'm not sure I know-

ALLY

Well, we just got here. Just came in. And my brother went to get cake. Here he is!

(NICK returns with two pieces of cake.)

NICK

Hi.

ALLY

This is Millie Alverson, Nick!

(NICK realizes who he is seeing and is dumbstruck.)

MILLIE

Millie Hendricks.

ALLY

That's what I meant.

NICK

Would you like a piece of cake?

(He hands one to MILLIE.)