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The Conditions of Unconditional Love

a play in one act

by

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Recipient of the 2007 Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship for Drama

Time: Present
Scene: At Grandma's House
Characters: GRANDMA
TERRY, a teenager, boy or girl
At Rise: *GRANDMA is watching TV. A KNOCK on the door.
She answers it and TERRY enters.*

GRANDMA

Why, Terry, what a very nice surprise!

TERRY

Hi, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Come on in. How did you get here?

TERRY

I rode my bike.

GRANDMA

That's not a short ride, sit down. Take off your jacket. Just let me turn off the TV. I was watching Judge Mabalean. You ever watch her?

TERRY

Oh, yeah, she's tough. You don't have to turn it off, Grandma.

GRANDMA

No, no, I was just killing time while the spaghetti simmers.

TERRY

Um. Smells good.

GRANDMA

You going to stay for supper?

TERRY

I think so.

GRANDMA

Well, when you know so, tell me whether to set a plate or not.

TERRY

I meant I've got to ask Mom first.

GRANDMA

I know—I was just yanking your chains, honey.

TERRY

I know.

GRANDMA

Pushing your envelope.

TERRY

(Laughing) That's not how you use that term, actually.

GRANDMA

No? I thought I'd try it out.

TERRY

Good try but no cigar. *(Smelling the aroma again.)*
Smells like you used sausage in the gravy today.

GRANDMA

I did—mushrooms too. I wouldn't have put them in if I'd known you were going to eat with me.

TERRY

That's okay. I can fish them out.

GRANDMA

You want something to eat now?

TERRY

No, thanks.

GRANDMA

A soda? Juice?

TERRY

Naw.

GRANDMA

I still got a few pieces of my Valentine's candy.

TERRY

I'm not hungry, thanks.

GRANDMA

You sick?

TERRY

No!

GRANDMA

I don't think I've ever known you to not eat after school.

TERRY

Oh, I stopped and got a Whopper on the way here.

GRANDMA

That's the grandchild I know and love. With fries?

TERRY

That goes without saying.

GRANDMA

It didn't actually. I just said it.

TERRY appears restless, wandering around the room, examining things that had been there a zillion years already. GRANDMA silently observes.

GRANDMA

So--how's school?

TERRY

Okay, I guess. Except history. My teacher keeps talking about Congress, and we just studied all that stuff back in middle school. I mean, it was boring once—but twice?

GRANDMA

It shouldn't be boring, not if a teacher knows how to do his job.

TERRY

Her. It's Mrs. Petrakis.

GRANDMA

Is she still there? She was old when your father had her—but I recall she was a very good teacher.

TERRY

She's pretty good. It's history that stinks.

GRANDMA

Didn't you even learn one interesting thing today?

TERRY

Um, let's see...um...did you know Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey to be the official bird of the United States?

GRANDMA

No.

TERRY

Yeah. Congress fought him on that one. They chose the eagle instead. I mean, who would want a turkey sitting on top of the flagpole?

GRANDMA

Or sailors with huge turkeys tattooed across their chests? *(Grandma starts getting into it.)* Turkeys on our money. Or that airplane squadron—the Flying Eagles—instead they'd be the Flying Turkeys!

Terry cracks a much-too-patient smile, then there is awkward silence.

TERRY

Did you go out today?

GRANDMA

No. I went out yesterday.

TERRY
Where'd you go?

GRANDMA
I picked up my new eyeglasses at the mall.

Terry picks up the glasses from a nearby table.

TERRY
How come you're not wearing them?

GRANDMA
I don't like 'em very much. They're bifocals.

TERRY
It just takes time to get used to them.

GRANDMA
Capisce. [*"I understand" in Italian.*]

TERRY
Nice frames.

GRANDMA
Thanks. (*Awkward silence.*) So what's new with you, sweetheart?

TERRY
Nothing.

GRANDMA
How are things at home?

TERRY
Don't ask.

GRANDMA
Something wrong at home?

TERRY
No.

GRANDMA
How's your mother?

TERRY
She's all freaking out.

GRANDMA
Oh, yeah?

TERRY
Yeah.

GRANDMA
Over what?

TERRY
She thinks somebody stole fifty dollars from her.

GRANDMA
Oh, no!

TERRY
She's having a cow over it.

GRANDMA
Well, you can imagine how upset she must be, seeing as how long it takes her to earn that much money.

TERRY
You think fifty dollars is a lot of money?

GRANDMA
Well...yes...don't you?

TERRY
Not nowadays. A pair of shoes costs fifty dollars.

GRANDMA
Exactly.

TERRY
Lee's mom paid over eighty bucks for a pair of Van's.

GRANDMA
Van's what?

TERRY
Vans. They're shoes.

GRANDMA

Oh. And your friend Lee's got a pair—and you would like a pair too?

TERRY

No. I'm not into Vans.

GRANDMA

Eighty-dollar-shoes would be very difficult for your mother to afford right now.

TERRY

I don't care about the shoes, Grandma!!!!!!!!!!

GRANDMA

Then why are we talking about them?????

TERRY

Because eighty dollars is more than fifty dollars.

GRANDMA

Yes—thirty dollars more, to be precise. Which is about twice more than your mother earns per hour at work.

TERRY

Now you know what I mean—she makes fifteen dollars *every hour* and she acts like she lost a million.

GRANDMA

Before taxes.

TERRY

Huh?

GRANDMA

She has to pay taxes on that fifteen dollars. She only gets to keep about twelve or thirteen of it.

TERRY

Still, thirteen dollars an hour is a lot of money.

GRANDMA

Of course the rent on your apartment is eight hundred a month.

TERRY

How'd you know that?

GRANDMA

Because your landlord raised it last summer and I remember your poor mother worrying about paying the increase.

TERRY

Oh, yeah.

GRANDMA

If she brings home thirteen dollars an hour and has to pay out eight hundred dollars right off the top for rent, that's... that's (*figuring in her head*)...about sixty-one hours she has to work just for rent.

TERRY

That's more than a week.

GRANDMA

Yeah.

TERRY

You figured that in your head. Pretty good.

GRANDMA

The old girl's still got it—from time to time—but getting back to the money, it's understandable that Mom's upset that somebody stole fifty dollars from her, especially if she thinks one of her coworkers took it.

TERRY

Um...no...she says she got it at the ATM after work and then came straight home.

GRANDMA

It disappeared at home????

TERRY

She says. But I think she must be mixed up. She must have gone to the ATM before she went to work.

GRANDMA

Hmmmm.

TERRY

(Terry turns the TV back on.) You want to watch Judge Mablean some more?

GRANDMA

I guess.

She waits patiently for Terry, whose eyes are glued to the TV, to speak, but Terry remains silent.

GRANDMA (cont'd)

I wonder where that money went to.

She waits. Terry watches TV. Finally, Terry speaks with great reluctance.

TERRY

Ya know, Grandma, we've known each other a pretty long time now, haven't we?

GRANDMA

You could say that since I was in the delivery room when you were born.

TERRY

Oh, yeah, I forgot.

GRANDMA

Did you? I never will. I remember when I saw your little head come out and heard your first cry. And then the nurse bundled you all up and handed you to me because your momma was too weak to sit up—she had lost too much blood.

TERRY

Gross.

GRANDMA

It's not gross, it's natural. All women bleed when they have babies. Your momma just lost a little more than usual.

TERRY

She couldn't sit up?

GRANDMA

She was too weak, so I held you right down next to her cheek and she held on to your teensie finger and we looked at you and looked at you. You had the biggest brown eyes I've ever seen. You were

nothing but eyes, just like your daddy—your momma took one look at you and cried and cried.

TERRY

My dad's pictures don't show his eyes that big.

GRANDMA

They were. You still look just like him, you know.

TERRY

I know.

GRANDMA

He was so excited you were on the way.

TERRY

I know.

GRANDMA

He only wanted for you to have a good life. That's why he joined up. They said they would pay for his college when he came home. Then he could get a really good job, he said, and give you everything he couldn't afford in his old job.

TERRY

I know. *(They watch TV in silence.)*

GRANDMA

I miss him.

TERRY

I know.

GRANDMA

Having you is like having him back in many ways, Terry. Do you have any idea how much I love you?

Terry's eyes remain glued to the TV.

TERRY

Aw, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Don't "aw, Grandma" me. There's no one else here to see, so I can be a little mushy. The day you were born was the happiest

day of my life. I got my son back in his own little baby. I held you and cried and cried right along with your mother.

TERRY

There sure was a lot of crying going on at that hospital.

GRANDMA

You will never know a day in your life that I do not love you. You are the rainbow in my sky.

TERRY

You've been hanging out at the Hallmark card shop again, haven't you?

GRANDMA

I was at the mall, and I had time to kill after I picked up my glasses....but it's a sentiment I truly feel.

TERRY

Even if...I mean...wonder if...would you...like...if I disappointed you and did something really...bad...would you still love me, do you think?

GRANDMA

No matter what you do, no matter what, Terry, I will always love you...and I'll always be there to help you face your mistakes, to help you learn from them. I promise.

TERRY

Even if it's *really* bad?

GRANDMA

Even if it's really bad. Terry, is there something you want to discuss with me?

TERRY

No.

GRANDMA

Terry, darling, are you sure there is not something you want to talk to your ole' granny about?

TERRY

No.

GRANDMA
Anything? (*Terry finally looks at GRANDMA.*)

TERRY
Well, Grandma...

GRANDMA
Yes, Terry?

TERRY
Grandma...

GRANDMA
Yes, Terry?

TERRY
Grandma...

GRANDMA
Terry.

TERRY
Grandma...

GRANDMA
What is it, Terry?

TERRY
Aw, never mind.

GRANDMA
Terry, I've already got one foot in the grave—are you trying to push the other one in?

TERRY
Aw, Grandma.

Just then a cell phone plays. Terry does not acknowledge it.

GRANDMA
What's that?

TERRY
What?

GRANDMA
That music coming from your jacket.

TERRY
Oh, that.

GRANDMA
Yeah, that.

TERRY
It's just my cell phone.

GRANDMA
You have a cell phone?

TERRY
Yeah. Everybody's got one.

GRANDMA
I don't.

TERRY
Well, people born this century, Grandma.

GRANDMA
Don't be a smart aleck.

TERRY
Excuse me a second. (*Answering the cell phone*) Oh, hi, Lee.
Yeah. No. Yeah. I'm over at my Grandma's house...my
Grandmother's...yeah, she's still alive.

GRANDMA
Just barely.

TERRY
Sorry, Grandma. (*To Lee*) When? Next Saturday? Yeah, I want
to. Okay. Talk to Mercury—

GRANDMA
—Mercury?

—and then call me back. Tonight. Late. Don't call until
I'm in bed. After eleven. You know why, jerk. Capisce?

Yeah. Okay. Later. *(Closes phone.)* You want to see my new phone, Grandma?

GRANDMA

Very nice.

TERRY I

I'll take a picture of you.

GRANDMA

It takes pictures?

TERRY

Say cheese.

GRANDMA

Good grief—I probably look like I fell out of bed.

TERRY

Now when you call me, your picture will pop up on the screen.

GRANDMA

When I call you? I don't have the number for this thing.

TERRY

I'll write it down before I go home. Look at your picture.

GRANDMA

I do look like I fell out of bed.

TERRY

Go ahead, call somebody. Call for the time.

GRANDMA

I know what time it is. There's a clock on the wall.

TERRY

Just call to use the phone. It's great.

GRANDMA

I can't see the numbers.

TERRY

Put on your new glasses. *(She does.)*

GRANDMA

I still can't see the numbers. Where'd you get this phone anyway?

TERRY

I saved up my money. You gave me money for Christmas, don't you remember, and my birthday, and so did Uncle Dean and Aunt Angeline. Mom did too.

GRANDMA

Hmmm.

TERRY

Don't you believe me, Grandma?

GRANDMA

Did Uncle Dean and Aunt Angeline give you enough money for a cell phone that takes pictures? Because I didn't.

TERRY

What are you saying, Grandma?

GRANDMA

I'm saying this is a hell of an expensive item for you to have paid for with your own money.

TERRY

You never talked that way to me before, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Well, I'm talking that way now and I'm saying this is a hell of an expensive phone and I wonder where you got the money. Now I know psychology books would probably tell me to wait it out until you decide to confess—but since it's highly unlikely that hell is going to freeze over any time soon—I'm going to ask you point blank. Capisce? Terry, did you take your mother's fifty dollars?

TERRY

Don't you trust me??????

GRANDMA

Think before you answer me, Terry. Don't add insult to injury. Did you steal fifty dollars from your mother to buy that phone?

TERRY

I only borrowed it.

GRANDMA

Terry!

TERRY

I was short fifty dollars—fifty measly dollars—so I borrowed it. Just fifty bucks! I promise I'll pay it back—

GRANDMA

—you're damned right you will—

TERRY

Are you going to tell my mom????

GRANDMA

No.

TERRY

Thanks, Grandma!

GRANDMA

Because you are.

TERRY

She'll kill me.

GRANDMA

No, she will not kill you. She will want to kill you. She will threaten to kill you. She may look like she is going to kill you, but, in the end, she will not kill you. She will punish you, and you will have deserved that punishment.

TERRY

What do you think she'll do?

GRANDMA

I imagine you will be grounded until your fortieth birthday.

TERRY

Aw, Grandma, I'm serious.

GRANDMA

Well, then, seriously, what do you think she should do?

TERRY

Take away my TV privileges?

GRANDMA

Oh, please, that's so lame.

TERRY

Computer privileges too.

GRANDMA

Honey, for stealing fifty dollars *from your own mother*, you should lose *every* privilege, including your bathroom privileges. *(Terry laughs.)*

TERRY

You always make me laugh, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Child, I don't want you to think this isn't serious. It is. You're at that age—right on the edge of young adulthood—where you have to decide—what kind of person am I going to be? A person of honor or a person of shame? It's not something that comes when you're old. It begins in your youth. It begins right now.

TERRY

If I tell Mom, she'll hate me.

GRANDMA

She will not.

TERRY

How should I do it?

GRANDMA

All you can do is rely on love.

TERRY

What do you mean?

GRANDMA

She loves you. You love her. Rely on that love. Tell her you took the money. Tell her why. And tell her how sorry you are that you hurt her. Tell her how much you love her

and how you will never hurt her like that again..

TERRY

And I never will! You should have seen her tearing our apartment apart looking for that money.

GRANDMA

And you sitting there watching her, not saying a word.

TERRY

Uh huh.

GRANDMA

Did you feel like a piece of crap?

TERRY

Yes.

GRANDMA

Good. Tell her that.

TERRY

I will and I will vow to her that I'll never hurt her again!

GRANDMA

Oh, yes, you will. You'll hurt her in a hundred—what am I saying?—a thousand other ways before your teenage years are over, but stealing from her won't be one of them, will it?

TERRY

Never.

The cell phone plays its music again. Terry looks at its caller I.D. and is shocked.

GRANDMA

Your jacket is playing music again.

TERRY

Oh, my God! How did she....hello, Mom. How did you know??? *(Terry listens to an obvious blasting.)*

GRANDMA

Whew! I'm half deaf and I can hear that.

TERRY

Mom, I'm sorry. I really am, Mom. I won't ever do it again. I'll pay you back, Mom, every penny. I'll sell the phone. I don't know why. I was crazy. I love you so much, Mom. Yeah, that's what I said. I love you, and I know you love me, too, and we should rely on that love. You *can* trust me, Mom. You can trust me from now on, I promise. Aw, Mom don't cry. I don't want to make you cry. Please don't cry. Please stop. I'll do whatever you want to make it up to you. Mom, I love you. Okay. Okay. Yeah, yeah, I understand. You're right. That's fair, Mom. Grandma said until I was forty. Yeah, I'm at her house right now. Uh huh. Spaghetti. (*To Grandma*) With garlic bread?

GRANDMA

With garlic bread.

TERRY

Mom wants to know if you have enough spaghetti for me and her tonight?

GRANDMA

I always have enough spaghetti for you and her.

TERRY

She says yes. Okay. See you in a minute. (*Shuts phone.*) She's on her way.

GRANDMA

Good.

TERRY

Whew! What a relief!

GRANDMA

Honesty is a wonderful feeling, isn't it?

TERRY

I'll say. She cried when I told her I loved her.

GRANDMA

Yes.

TERRY

Telling her I love her really works.

GRANDMA

I know—but only say it when you mean it.
Don't go throwing those words around like they mean nothing
or pretty soon they will mean nothing. Capiisce?

TERRY

Capiisce...Grandma?

GRANDMA

Yes, sweetie?

TERRY

You know you can rely on our love too, don't you?

GRANDMA

Bene. (*They embrace for a long time.*)

TERRY

Grandma.

GRANDMA

What, sweetheart?

TERRY

Would you loan me the fifty dollars?

GRANDMA

Terry! (*The tender embrace is over.*)

TERRY

I could pay Mom back and I could owe you the
money instead and I could work it off next
summer by mowing your lawn.

GRANDMA

First of all, I am not bailing you out on a theft charge.
You will work that money off for your mother, like
I'm sure she just told you on the phone.

TERRY

Yeah, she did.

GRANDMA

Second of all, I think your mowing my lawn is a
splendid idea and I'll take you up on that offer.

TERRY

Great.

GRANDMA

And third of all—and this is the biggie—here and now your life of crime is officially over. No more stealing. You tried it. You got busted. You're done. Capisce?

TERRY

Capisce.

GRANDMA

You don't want to end up like some moron on Judge Mabelean.

TERRY

No more stealing, Grandma. Ever.

GRANDMA

And lastly—

TERRY

I thought "no more stealing" would be the last one.

GRANDMA

Who's listing these conditions, you or me?

TERRY

You.

GRANDMA

Now, lastly, you've got to erase that picture and take another one. I look like Methuselah in this one.

TERRY

Okay. (*Terry erases the picture.*) Why don't you put your new glasses on?

GRANDMA

Those things? You want me to look like an old lady?

TERRY

Okay, then, smile.

GRAMDMA

No, I want both of us in the picture. Come here.

Terry stands next to Grandma and holds the camera stretched out straight.

TERRY

Okay, on the count of three, say “cheese!”

GRANDMA

What kind?

TERRY

One. Two. Three.

GRANDMA AND TERRY

Romano!

Curtain.