

Drama/Period Piece

Growing Up Treacherously

By Tara Meddaugh

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1800s. MRS. GRANT, a woman in her 30s-40s, has been away caring for her sick aunt when she is called back home by her teenage daughter, Mary. Mary informs her that Jane, Mrs. Grant's younger daughter, who has also been ill, has taken a turn for the worse and is now dying. Mary has held the house together while her father (fighting in the Civil War) and mother are gone, but she has been desperate to have her mother back. MRS. GRANT speaks to Mary, to give her comfort that she may now resume the role as child once more, but also warns her that the future, as an adult, is not one without obstacles. One merely hopes that the joy of love outweighs the grief of tragedy.

MRS. GRANT

When I received your telegram to make haste and come home, my heart ached for you. You're but sixteen years old and you have had to care for your very ill sister entirely on your own. Your last letter to me expressed your fear in how treacherous growing up will be. How if it will be only one obstacle after another, you would rather decline this invitation into adulthood. I wish that I could tell you that you would not experience obstacles. That this would be your only trial. Your only loss.

(pause)

I know you have longed for me, your mother, to come and make things right. To restore you to your proper place as daughter, as older sister—not as nurse, not as the only grown up person of the house to make decisions on very serious matters. I can do this for you, my darling Mary. You may step back and read your books aloud to Jane and let me change her bed and hold the cloth to her forehead and make arrangements as the situation necessitates. You may go on a stroll now and breathe the fresh air outdoors. You may pick flowers and bring them back if you like, but you may leave them on their stalks, as well. I will comfort you and Jane and I will make things easier for you now.

(pause)

But I cannot stop what is to come. What you will see as Jane grows worse. I cannot solve all of the obstacles that you or I will face. I sometimes do not feel so much older than you myself, my Mary. I don't always feel equipped to steer the helm while your father is gone, or even when he is present. Being a grown up does not give you answers. But yes, my incredibly strong daughter, it does give you more experiences. And you see more tragedy, and in each one, you learn that while it is unique to you, it has happened so many times before and it will happen so many more times to come. And there is something in this. And you hold onto the hope, that the joys

of being an adult and having deep love—for whoever or whatever it is that you love—you hope this love will outweigh the tragedies. But it is very difficult to have one without the other.

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