

NANNY AND BLAKE

By Kendra Myers

Nanny and Blake was commissioned by the Southern Foodways Alliance in 2003. The play received a staged reading as part of the 2003 Southern Foodways Symposium, themed "Appalachia: Exploring the Land and the Larder." The reading was on the Oxford Square in Oxford, Mississippi, on Thursday, 2 October, with the following cast:

Nanny: Charlene Dye

Blake: Anna Baker

Stage Directions: Andy Harper

Musicians: Angela Watkins and Robert Hawkins

Production assistance was provided by Mary Bath Lasseter and Sean Hughes.

Special Thanks to the actors, Amy Evans for designing and creating a spectacular backdrop, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, Off Square Books and the Oxford Tourism Council, and John T. Edge and the Southern Foodways Alliance.

Extra Special Thanks to Shay Youngblood.

Nanny and Blake is dedicated to Nana Sybil Myers and to the memories of Nana Dorothy McConaughy and Aunt Fairy Niccum.

NANNY AND BLAKE

By Kendra Myers

For the Southern Foodways Symposium

Oxford, Mississippi, October 2003

[MUSIC BEGINS BEFORE STAGE DIRECTIONS. MUSIC FADES AS STAGE DIRECTIONS BEGIN.]

SCENE ONE

It's summertime, present day. We're looking at the front of a small, neat house in the North Georgia mountains. It may list slightly to one side. There is a porch along the length of the house with two rocking chairs. A garden is visible stage left. The trees behind the house are a rich green. The garden is filling with plants: beans creeping up their runners, tomatoes ripening, spurts of cabbage in rows. There are flowers, too, across the front of the house. Birds chirp. Occasionally an airplane might fly overhead.

It's late afternoon. Nanny, early 80's, still vigorous but slowing down, comes through the screen door onto the porch with a basket of bright strawberries. She peers eagerly stage right, down the road, then sits in one of the rocking chairs and begins to trim and slice the berries.

After a moment, there is a crunch of gravel under car tires and a car horn beeps twice, cheerfully. The car radio is audible, some peppy music, and then it, and the car, shut off.

BLAKE

[offstage]

Nanny Nanny!

NANNY

[rises]

Blakey Blakey!

[Blake, 29, healthy, sensible, and kind, jogs in and hugs Nanny fiercely.]

BLAKE

Hi, Nanny. Hi.

NANNY

[pulls back, smooths Blake's hair]

Squirrel's nest on your head. Riding with the top down on that little car.

BLAKE

It's too beautiful a day. I wanted to see everything.

NANNY

See a lot more if you'd slow down for a minute.

BLAKE

I know, Nanny.

NANNY

It's good to see you. Can I help you with your bag?

BLAKE

No, thank you.

[Blake runs off and comes back dragging a huge suitcase.]

NANNY

[calling to her]

So sweet of you to come and visit your old Nanny -

[sees Blake's bag]

Lord a'mercy, child, how long are you staying?

BLAKE

Just on the weekends to start. I'll keep up my practice in Atlanta during the week for now, at least, while you're - uh - did you and Mother not talk about it?

NANNY

Well, we agreed that you should come up and visit. Clear your head a little. After that man up and left you out of the clear blue sky like that.

BLAKE

What?

NANNY

Of course you can stay as long as you want to, as long as you can. You're good company. Just startled me with that big bag, is all.

[Nanny heads for the porch. Blake follows.]

BLAKE

I see.

NANNY

We'll get you over that broken heart in no time. What you need to do is to meet someone new. I'm not sure who's available on the mountain, but I could find out -

BLAKE

That's okay, Nanny. It'll be a while before I go out on another date. Uh - did Mother say anything else about what I'd be here for?

NANNY

I know I'm going to put your fanny to work, but your mother don't care about that.

BLAKE

I'm here to help you.

NANNY

Good. I think we'll have more tomatoes than ever this year. I planted early because it's been so nice and warm - we'll have time to plant again, I bet you.

BLAKE

Nanny -

NANNY

[overlapping]

And the peppers are -

BLAKE

Nanny, I'm here to help you because you - you can't go through chemotherapy all by yourself. We have to make sure

BLAKE (con't)

you're eating right and getting enough exercise. I'll speak with your doctor. Where do you go? Dawsonville?

NANNY

No more doctors.

BLAKE

You have to have a doctor.

NANNY

I can't stand them.

BLAKE

I'm a doctor.

NANNY

Oh, well, you're different. You're a doctor for athletes, not old ladies. Old-lady doctors are just awful. Call you "dear" and "sweetie" and they don't even know you.

BLAKE

You still need to trust them. I'll take care of everything. I can give you medicine if you're in pain -

NANNY

If you're here to be my nursemaid, you're going to get awful bored. I'm doing fine.

BLAKE

I know you are.

NANNY

Good.

[Pause.]

BLAKE

Mother said that since your diagnosis, you've been having some trouble with dizziness -

NANNY

Now, are you going to get that stuff of yours in the house? I've got to put these strawberries up in a preserve, and it's time to get ready for supper.

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am.

[Blake carries her things into the house. Nanny sits in one of the rocking chairs and lifts the strawberries into her lap. Blake returns after a moment.]

NANNY

You'll be needing an apron. I've got an extra hanging behind the door in there.

BLAKE

I remember where they are.

[Blake ducks back inside.]

NANNY

[hollering to Blake]

Bring that sack of peas out here, would you, Blakey? We need to snap them if we want them for supper.

BLAKE

[returning]

We're having sugar snap peas!

NANNY

I thought it was you who liked them so much.

BLAKE

Yay!

*[Blake sits in the other chair for
Nanny's lecture.]*

NANNY

You remember how this works?

BLAKE

I think so.

NANNY

[demonstrating] You hold one in your hand, so, and you go, snap, pull the string, snap, pull the string, toss. Got it?

BLAKE

[awkwardly at first, but then she remembers]

Snap, pull, snap, pull, toss -

NANNY

Now, don't do it like when you were little, when you went snap, pull, snap, pull, eat.

[Blake laughs, as she's already eaten her first successfully snapped pea.]

NANNY (con't)

You ate two for every three you snapped.

BLAKE

[crunching] They're so good!

[They laugh and then fall into silence while Blake snaps the peas and Nanny prepares the strawberries. It's quiet for some time. It begins to get a little uncomfortable, maybe, with each wanting to speak but not knowing what to say or how to say it.]

NANNY

[pause] How's it coming? I don't hear a lot of crunching!

BLAKE

[holding up an example of her handiwork]

Do I pass?

NANNY

Good job.

[Silence again. Throughout the following exchanges, the women continue snapping and hulling. And snacking.]

BLAKE

I hope you'll show me how to do some things while I'm here.

NANNY

I'll have to. You're here to work.

BLAKE

Good. I really want to help.

NANNY

You were always a big help when you came to visit.

BLAKE

That's what you and Pap always used to say. You always said I was a big help, even when I was dropping things or kicking over milk buckets.

NANNY

Well, I guess we were always just happy to see you.

BLAKE

Do you still have the cow? She hated me. I couldn't milk her.

NANNY

Had to let that cow go, it got to be too hard for me to milk her every day. The Hardins - you remember them? Up the way a little? - they make sure I have enough milk when I haven't gotten into town. They bring by meat, too. I gave them our hogs when your Pap passed and they keep me in bacon and chops and everything else. Hogs are too hard to keep when you're on your own. Messy.

BLAKE

You don't still keep chickens, do you?

NANNY

No ma'am. Not anymore, no more animals for me. 'Cept for Buster, of course, but that old dog spends most of his time down at the creek anyway.

BLAKE

Ugh, chickens - I know it's city slicker of me, but chickens are scary.

NANNY

They can be moody, that's for sure. You should be scared of chickens, after our old rooster took off after you and just about pecked your legs off when you were little.

BLAKE

Oh, I remember -

NANNY

And your Pap was out in the yard in two seconds and had that rooster's neck wrung in a third. He was a tough old bird.

BLAKE

Pap?

NANNY

Him too, but I was talking about the rooster. He made a great pot pie.

BLAKE

Pap?

NANNY

[laughs] Him, too, but I was talking about the rooster.

BLAKE

A rooster that you probably needed attacked me, and so Pap killed him and we ate him?

NANNY

Got to show those roosters who's boss.

BLAKE

Wow. [pause] Did I ever eat squirrel?

NANNY

Sure you did. We all did.

BLAKE

Oh, my God.

NANNY

[laughing] Well, it's no Quarter Pounder with Cheese, but it's fine to eat.

BLAKE

Quarter Pounder with Cheese?

NANNY

Sometimes I'll catch a ride into town with one of the Evans boys. When I need something at the Wal-Mart. We stop at McDonald's. I love those fries.

BLAKE

Well, you need to think about eating better now, Nanny. In fact, here. I brought you something.

[Blake exits to her car and returns with a stick blender and powder for shakes.]

BLAKE (con't)

These are for you.

NANNY

[looks the packet over suspiciously]

Powder food?

BLAKE

They're good. You mix them with milk or yogurt and some fruit, and you get your nutrition.

NANNY

I like to chew my nutrition. I still have my teeth, you know, I don't have cancer of the teeth.

BLAKE

Well, yes, Nanny, but there may come a time when you can't take solid foods too well.

NANNY

When the cancer grows?

BLAKE

When you're in chemotherapy to keep it from growing. We'll need to keep you strong.

NANNY

I don't know what I'll do if I can't cook, can't eat.

BLAKE

We'll take it as it comes, Nanny. Everybody reacts differently to the treatments. We have to make sure we keep nutrients in your body.

NANNY

For fighting.

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am. For fighting.

NANNY

[nods] Well, go in there and grab some of those greens and let's get them torn.

BLAKE

I'm sorry, Nanny, but we have to -

NANNY

I know what we have to do. Get the greens, now, please.

[Blake obeys and returns to the porch.]

NANNY (con't)

Reach down there for the water can, dump some water in the bucket to rinse them off.

[Blake obeys once again.]

NANNY (con't)

Now swish them through, there, just let them float, the dirt'll sink down. And tear 'em - pretty big pieces like so - put the stems in a pile there, we'll save those.

[Blake does so, and the two work.
Silence falls again. Nanny's eye is
caught by something across the road.]

NANNY (con't)

Oh, sometimes I like to set out here and watch Jimmy Calhoun across the way, there. See, he's got a front porch swing that Wanda and her kids brought him up from Atlanta, and he loves sitting in it, but sometimes he takes a little too much wine, and he gets stuck in it.

BLAKE

Stuck in a swing? *[she cranes her neck to see]*

NANNY

Oh, there he goes. Every time he tries to stand up from swinging, the bench comes back and smacks him in the back of his legs and he sits back down again. I know it ain't Christian to laugh, but it sure is funny.

BLAKE

Should I go help him?

NANNY

Lord no, child, it would just embarrass him to bits. He'll get out soon enough.

BLAKE

Wait - is that No-Brakes Calhoun?

NANNY

You remember that?

BLAKE

I remember Pap talking about when you got your first car -

NANNY

'38 Plymouth.

BLAKE

And No-Brakes wanted to learn to drive it and he wouldn't leave Pap alone until Pap taught him -

NANNY

Jimmy should have known better than to bother your Pap.

BLAKE

And so Pap told him that to make the car stop, you had to pull on its wheel - like on a mule's reins.

NANNY

And so he raced down this way here and got to the curve, all the while yelling "whoa!" and yanking on that steering wheel like it was the end of the world -

BLAKE

And he went right off the road and through the Evans's barn!

NANNY

And into a tree. Laugh was on your Pap after all, he had to get a new radiator.

[Nanny rises and stretches.]

NANNY (con't)

Oh my, this all goes much faster with another pair of hands. [pause] And somebody to talk to. I'm glad you're here, dear.

BLAKE

Me, too.

[Blake rears back and gives a mighty sneeze]

BLAKE (con't)

Oh, man, excuse me!

NANNY

Bless you!

BLAKE

I have such allergies -

NANNY

I can fix that - hold on.

[Nanny goes into the cabin. Blake sneezes again and wipes her nose on her apron, causing her to sneeze again, quickly. She may mutter, "dammit." Nanny returns with a piece of bread and a small jug of honey.]

BLAKE

Thank you, but I'm not hungry, I'll just wait for supper -

[Blake sneezes again. Nanny spreads
honey on the bread.]

NANNY

Just have a taste. If you have some every day, you won't get the allergies.

[Blake bites into the bread.]

BLAKE

Mmm, this is good honey.

NANNY

From right across the way. Local honey, local bees, no more sneeze.

BLAKE

Pap used to keep bees.

NANNY

Mmm-hmm. He made you a little bee keeper's helmet to wear.

BLAKE

I was too scared to get close.

NANNY

He'd'a never let you get stung, Cakes. [pause] You remember I used to call you that when you were small?

BLAKE

Cakes. [laughs] Yeah, I do remember.

NANNY

Know why?

BLAKE

Because it rhymes with Blake?

NANNY

Well, that's part of it. But your Pap gave you that name because of how you would watch him roll out dough for tea cakes and whatnot. These little bits would roll off, little scraps. Your head didn't even come up to the table, but your little paw would sneak up there and snatch off those little scraps - boom! Before we knew it! Dough don't taste like much, but you loved it, didn't you?

BLAKE

I still do.

NANNY

I'll remember to make the dumplings myself tonight.

BLAKE

I don't know what it is about it! Raw dough. Yummy. Maybe I thought my belly would just cook it up.

NANNY

Pap started to call you "Scraps," but I thought that sounded like a puppy or a boxer. So I said, no, she's Cakes. [pause] Run in there and get me some sweet potatoes. Thought I'd fry them, or make a soufflé or something. It okay with you if we have all veggies for supper? Everything's so fresh.

BLAKE

I'd love that, thank you, Nanny.

NANNY

Good.

[Blake goes into the cabin. Nanny has
a pang of pain in her side, which she
covers quickly.]

BLAKE

[offstage]

Potatoes are where?

NANNY

[through clenched teeth]

On the other side of the stove.

BLAKE

I got them.

NANNY

Grab the peeler that's on the hook there, too, please.

BLAKE

Got it.

[Blake returns.]

BLAKE (con't)

I think I know how to peel potatoes.

NANNY

I'm sure you do. Just save the peels in with the greens stems, there.

BLAKE

Okay.

[There is a pause. Blake is working and Nanny is looking out over the yard.]

NANNY

You remember much about your Pap?

BLAKE

I do. I remember how big he was.

NANNY

The scarecrows we made out of his old clothes cast such big shadows in the garden, we had to plant around them.

BLAKE

He used to sing to the horse when he was plowing.

NANNY

'Member that horse's name?

BLAKE

[laughs] Elvis. Mom named him.

NANNY

He was such a pain. Used to plow just fine, right down the row of sweet potatoes, and then he'd see something he

NANNY (con't)

wanted to look at or think about or chew on, and he'd just up and stop in the middle of the row and do as he pleased. Just like a mule.

BLAKE

Why didn't you have a mule?

NANNY

We did. He died, and it got to where we weren't putting out enough bushels to get another one. So Elvis went to work.

BLAKE

How did he die, Nanny?

NANNY

Oh, you know, he just got old and went.

BLAKE

No, not - I mean Pap.

NANNY

Oh. Well. He was tough right to the end, you know. Worked as long as he could.

BLAKE

He did? *[pause]* So how, Nanny?

NANNY

The cancer, I suppose.

BLAKE

You don't know? You never went to the doctor?

NANNY

It happened a long time ago. He hated doctors. No offense. I know he'd be real proud of you and all you've done.

BLAKE

But how could he just get sick and not do anything? You didn't talk about it?

NANNY

[shrugs] Man like that don't need to talk.

BLAKE

Everybody needs to talk.

NANNY

Don't want to talk, then, don't have to talk.

BLAKE

He never told you anything? About being in pain? About being scared?

NANNY

I washed the blood out of his handkerchiefs. I served him meals that got smaller and smaller, took in his trousers when they got smaller and smaller, kissed his face when it got yellow and tiny. He didn't need to tell me a thing.

BLAKE

Nanny - you'll tell me if you hurt, won't you? Because I don't think I can read your mind -

NANNY

Honey, I wouldn't ask you to.

BLAKE

People should talk about things.

NANNY

Hand me that basket, will you, this one's full.

BLAKE

Yes, ma'am.

[They are quiet. Blake ferries the baskets full of prepared food back into the house. Nanny is watching the yard.]

BLAKE (con't)

[offstage]

Nanny, how are you going to cook these greens?

NANNY

[calling back]

Boil them in chicken broth, drop in some dumplings. Why?

BLAKE

Just wondering. I don't usually care for greens.

NANNY

You'll like these. Look in the icebox, would you, and bring me that bottle that looks like it's got water in it.

BLAKE

Okay.

[Blake returns with a two-liter Coke bottle with no label. It's filled with clear liquid.]

BLAKE (cont)

What is this?

NANNY

Sugar water for the hummingbirds. Feeders are getting low.

BLAKE

[looking into the yard] Why do you have so many?

NANNY

Hummingbirds get hungry this time of year, right before they go on south. Nasty, too - they fight over the feeders. I try to have enough for everybody.

BLAKE

Oh, look at that one - he's whacking into all the others!

NANNY

Nasty little thing.

BLAKE

I'm going to have tea. You want some?

NANNY

I'd rather have one of those drinks in the icebox. Those
Rush drinks in the little cans.

BLAKE

You mean an energy drink?

NANNY

They're good. Got the ginseng. Keep you going.

BLAKE

Nanny, those drinks are nothing but caffeine, they're awful
for you! They're like speed!

NANNY

I can't go out and dig for my own 'seng anymore - are you
going to tell me I can't at least have my hippity-hoppity
'seng drink?

BLAKE

I'm making you some ginger tea. That's close enough.

NANNY

Oh, all right. You know where everything is?

BLAKE

I remember.

[Blake goes inside. There is a pause
as Nanny watches the hummingbirds. She
reacts to the fighting of the main
aggressor. Having had enough of his
nonsense, she reaches behind a chair on
the porch to retrieve a shotgun and a

shell. She loads, aims carefully, then
squeezes off a shot. It's loud as
hell, and Blake tears outside,
babbling.]

BLAKE (con't)

Jesus Christ on a crutch, what the hell was that? A
cannon? Are you all right?

NANNY

[cool as a cucumber] Fine, fine, Blake. I got him.
[indicates where the bird had been]

BLAKE

You - you shot a hummingbird? With a - is that a shotgun?

NANNY

Yes, it was your Pap's -

BLAKE

[overlapping]

Is that legal? To have a shotgun? And to shoot it at a -

NANNY

[overlapping]

There ain't nothing wrong -

BLAKE

[overlapping]

How did you even hit him? He must be in a billion pieces -

NANNY

Nasty little thing.

[Nanny sits.]

NANNY (con't)

And you ought not to take the name of our Savior in vain, Blake, and you ought not to talk about Him being on crutches.

BLAKE

I'm sorry, Nanny, only you scared the hell out of me -

NANNY

And I'll scare hell right back into you, girl, you don't clean up that mouth. *[indicating where the birds are]* Look, see, now everybody can get to a feeder. Wasn't his place to be running everybody off like that.

BLAKE

So you - this is how harmony and balance are restored to the natural world?

NANNY

Yes to whatever it is you just said. Now, let's get moving. We have to make sure supper's all done and cleaned up by 7 tonight.

BLAKE

Why?

NANNY

Braves are playing the Mets. I hate the Mets.

BLAKE

[laughs] Me, too. The mayor of New York even hates the Mets. I just hope I don't fall asleep before the game's over - it's been a long day.

NANNY

Don't worry. Won't be a long game - Maddux is pitching. That boy throws like he's got somewhere to be. You want me to fry the sweet potatoes, or soufflé them?

BLAKE

Soufflé, please. Yours is the best ever.

NANNY

Let's go in and I'll show you the secret.

BLAKE

Secret ingredient?

NANNY

Not-secret ingredient, but secret way to use it.

BLAKE

Ooo. What?

NANNY

[conspiratorially] Separate the eggs. Come on.

[They are exiting.]

[MUSIC BEGINS SOFTLY.]

BLAKE

Why do I think I'm about to make a big mess in here?

NANNY

Because it's fun. 'S all right. You can always clean it up.

END OF SCENE ONE

[MUSIC CONTINUES FOR A MOMENT, THEN FADES AFTER STAGE DIRECTIONS BEGIN.]

SCENE TWO

It's into autumn now, but the porch is still sunny and pleasant. Nanny and Blake are in their chairs. The birds are gone, save for an occasional crow that skreeks out his caw. A hound dog might bay from the distance. It's still.

Nanny is slightly more frail, it seems. She's got a huge bowl of persimmons in front of her. They're putting together a whip. Blake's trying to write everything down, taking notes on how Nanny does things.

BLAKE

Wait - Nanny, slow down - how much sugar are you using?

NANNY

As much as it needs -

BLAKE

Nanny!

NANNY

Well, Blake, I don't know how many cups I use. It depends on the persimmons. Just enough to keep them from biting back, but not so much that it tastes like candy. You just have to feel it out.

BLAKE

I don't know how to do that. How am I supposed to -

NANNY

Of course you do. How about when a child comes to you, and he's hurt himself. An athlete. You ask him some questions, right?

BLAKE

Yes.

NANNY

And you may poke around a little, feel where he says it hurts?

BLAKE

I try not to poke my patients, but sure.

NANNY

How do you know what's wrong?

BLAKE

We do X-rays, MRIs, that kind of thing.

NANNY

Do you ever just look in his face?

BLAKE

What?

NANNY

Look in his face. Look in his eyes. See what's wrong.

BLAKE

Nanny - I try not to.

NANNY

Why not? People's faces can tell you so much.

BLAKE

That's just it, Nanny. Their eyes are full of hurt and fear. Let's say a sixteen-year-old girl comes to me. A soccer player. She's hurt her knee, and she knows that her parents can't pay for her to go to college if she doesn't get an athletic scholarship. She's scared to death, and I have to tell her that she needs surgery and rehab and that she may never have the same wicked kick again. At sixteen.

NANNY

You should trust yourself more, Blake. That little girl needs to be strong, and she needs your help.

BLAKE

I'm just sure I'm going to say the wrong thing or break the news all wrong.

NANNY

Aw, you know what to do. Just like - oh, give me that -

[Nanny grabs Blake's pad and pen out of her hand and flings them away.]

NANNY (con't)

Now, here - with the sugar -

[Blake reluctantly adds sugar and tastes the concoction.]

BLAKE

Wow. That's really good.

NANNY

See? You had it in you all along, didn't you?

BLAKE

I guess you never know.

NANNY

You can't write everything down in a book. Some things you just have to do. Now we dump the other stuff in, and we whip, and we'll bake it up and have us a pudding.

BLAKE

I'll do that.

[Blake adds the rest of the ingredients and stirs vigorously. Nanny reaches over, tastes the mixture, and approves. Blake smiles and keeps stirring. The two are quiet for a moment.]

NANNY

Honey?

BLAKE

Nanny?

NANNY

[pause] Why don't we get out some of that streak-of-lean and have some leather-britches with supper. That'll be good, huh?

BLAKE

Streak-of-what?

NANNY

Streak-of-lean. Salt pork with a streak of lean in the fat. It's good.

BLAKE

We can, but then you can't have sausage for breakfast until Sunday.

NANNY

Blakey, I feel fine!

BLAKE

I'm sorry, Nanny, but you know it doesn't agree with you. You can't go around like you always have. You have to eat right and eat carefully.

NANNY

Child, I am 200 years old! You can't tell me what I can and can't eat! The good Lord gave it to us, we dug it up and cooked it up, now we eat it!

BLAKE

Poke sallet is not going to cure you.

NANNY

Nothing's gonna cure me. But these things'll make me feel better. And if that's what I can hope for, then that's what I want. To feel better.

[Pause. Blake cannot help but relent.]

BLAKE

Nanny, I just want the best for you.

NANNY

I know you do, child. *[relaxes in her chair]* Do me a favor and bring out some of that cornbread, would you? I feel like a nibble. The persimmons can wait.

BLAKE

All right. But it's time to take your blood pressure.

NANNY

I can wear that arm thing and eat at the same time.

BLAKE

Be right back.

[Blake goes into the house and returns with an iron skillet about a quarter-full of cornbread, a blood pressure cuff, and a stethoscope.]

BLAKE (con't)

You want syrup?

NANNY

No, it's good just like this.

[Nanny picks out of the skillet with her hands. Blake reaches in for a pinch and then wraps the blood pressure cuff around Nanny's other arm. They both chew away while Blake takes Nanny's blood pressure. Blake is satisfied, makes a note on a pad, and sits back. Nanny looks at her closely.]

NANNY

You know, you look a lot better now.

BLAKE

Better than what?

NANNY

Than when you first got here. You were too skinny.

BLAKE

[laughs] I've never been skinny a day in my life.

NANNY

Well, you didn't look well. Pale. Your eyes had circles and your hair was a mess.

BLAKE

Geez, thanks, Nanny.

NANNY

And you had pimples.

BLAKE

Do go on -

NANNY

But you look better now. I was worried that you'd be bored up here.

BLAKE

Not at all! I love it! You always make me feel special.

NANNY

You are special, Cakes. And I thank you for all you're doing for me.

BLAKE

It's not half of what you're doing for me.

NANNY

I don't know about that, but it sure is nice to have someone to share all this with.

[Nanny gestures grandly to the world,
then takes a sip from a jar that she's
had squirreled away next to her.]

BLAKE

What's this?

NANNY

What's what?

BLAKE

That you're drinking?

NANNY

Oh, that's just some ginger beer.

BLAKE

Ginger what?

NANNY

[she knows she's busted] Ale. Soda.

BLAKE

Nanny, you have to stay out of that stuff! It's not good for you!

NANNY

Never hurt me before. I made it. It's not bad.

BLAKE

It'll make you -

NANNY

Oh, I know what it'll do, Cakes. Stop handling me -

BLAKE

I'm a doctor, Nanny, I have to -

NANNY

Doctor Cakes, will you kindly leave me alone!

BLAKE

How am I supposed to - you're so frustrating.

NANNY

[laughs] Not so bad. Just set in my ways.

BLAKE

What if that beer stuff reacts with your medicine?

NANNY

It don't matter.

[Nanny reaches for more cornbread.
Blake is at a loss, so she reaches for
more cornbread, too.]

NANNY (con't)

I never felt old before.

BLAKE

Oh, Nanny -

NANNY

It's all right. I should feel old. I got a daughter who's 60 and a granddaughter who's 30. That makes me old. But I never felt old, not while I was still taking care of things.

BLAKE

You still take care of things.

NANNY

No, Blake. I can't get around good anymore. When I fell up those stairs last month, I'd'a been stuck for days without you here. I'm old. [laughs] Everybody gets old. It's all right. I just - we always worked. All the time.

NANNY (con't)

And then after we worked, we ate and used what we made.
That's how it was. And now, if I can't work - who am I?

BLAKE

You still work. I just help you - so really, you're
working more, because you have to stop and teach me
everything while you're working. That's no fun.

NANNY

You cute thing. Of course it's fun. Watching you fret
over the canning and stealing bits of dough. That's more
fun than I've had in a while.

BLAKE

Well, good. [pause] Nanny?

NANNY

Dear?

BLAKE

Just to clear it up - I'm 29.

NANNY

Oh, so you're not old, that's what you're telling me? That
means you can work more. Fetch a couple of onions and
we'll fry them up for a snack. Here -

[Nanny hands Blake the skillet, which
is now empty.]

NANNY (con't)

- do it in this.

BLAKE

I don't know if we should fry -

NANNY

Blake.

BLAKE

Just a few.

NANNY

And honey?

[Nanny reaches for the skillet back.]

BLAKE

Uh-huh?

[Nanny feels the skillet - tests its weight in her hand, examines it closely.]

NANNY

I'm thinking you ought to have this.

BLAKE

Oh Nanny, I couldn't -

NANNY

I got another one. This one was Mama's, though, and you ought to have it. You know how to take care of it and you know how to use it.

BLAKE

I don't know how to thank you.

NANNY

I do! Fry me up some onions in it!

[MUSIC BEGINS.]

[Blake exits. Lights fade.]

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

[MUSIC FADES FAIRLY FAST.]

[Night-time. December. Cold. Nanny is sitting on the porch. She's gotten worse of late. Blake enters, worried.]

BLAKE

Nanny, what are you doing? Get back into bed -

NANNY

I'm just enjoying the night.

BLAKE

It's freezing out!

NANNY

Moon's almost full, look. Look at it shining through the persimmon tree, there. That's so pretty. [pause] Are we in Sagittarius? My mama used to never make pickles in Sagittarius.

BLAKE

I don't know - are you kidding me?

NANNY

She watched the sky all the time. Things were real different then. I used to get out of school when it was time to help with the hog slaughter and the apple butter.

BLAKE

Nanny, you should get back into bed. Let me take your blood pressure -

NANNY

Blake, I'm fine, I just want to set here a minute.

BLAKE

Well, will you call me when you're ready to come back in? So I can help you?

NANNY

I can get back into my own bed still.

BLAKE

Nanny, please listen to me. You have to take it easy. Doesn't it hurt -

NANNY

Blake, what is the matter with you? Of course it hurts. Lots of things hurt.

BLAKE

But Nanny, this is different.

NANNY

I know what's happening to me. I have the cancer. Of the womb. It's the strangest thing you can imagine. That thing, I haven't used that thing in fifty years, and I only used it once when I did use it. It did fine, it seemed to do fine, and I didn't think about it anymore, until all of a sudden there was the pain, and the dizziness, and then that doctor telling me with his syrupy voice -

BLAKE

Nanny, if you'd let me bring you to Atlanta with me, if you'd let me take you to my friend the oncologist - the cancer doctor who's really good -

NANNY

I'm not going back and forth to Atlanta to get shot full of electricity or drugs to try to kill something inside me.

BLAKE

But don't you want to -

NANNY

Live longer? Live forever or something? No, Blake-Cake. I'm not going to be no burden on nobody. [pause] Which is why you got to go. You can't stay up here no more.

BLAKE

You're not a burden -

NANNY

You got this great big life down in Atlanta. Why do you want to stop it all to help me die?

BLAKE

Nanny, I need you! [pause] I never knew where I was from before. I knew where I was going, or where I wanted to go, but it didn't mean anything. Now I know where I come from and I know where I am right now. I want to stay. Nanny, you have to let me.

NANNY

I never thought about it like that.

BLAKE

Well, you should. Because it's true. Now will you stop with the nonsense about me leaving you? I'm not leaving. No arguing. We're full-time roomies.

NANNY

It's not like I need you here all the time.

BLAKE

Of course not.

NANNY

But if it makes you feel better -

BLAKE

It does.

NANNY

Then I guess it's all right.

BLAKE

Okay, then. It's settled.

NANNY

For a little while.

[Blake helps Nanny into her rocking chair and stands above her, patting her head and rocking her.]

NANNY (con't)

I guess there's something fitting in the thing that brings you into this world, the thing where you grow and where your babies grow inside of you, being the thing that takes you out of it.

BLAKE

Well. We're a ways off from that.

NANNY

You better not stay here with me, you'll turn into a hillbilly. Old dirt farmer like your Nanny.

BLAKE

I could do worse.

[MUSIC BEGINS.]

[They smile at each other. Lights fade.]

END OF PLAY

[MUSIC PLAYS AS ACTORS BOW. MUSICIANS TAKE THEIR ACCOLADES AS WELL. EVERYBODY'S HAPPY.]