

## COLD

By Lila Whelan

28 Plays Later – Play 5

### GRAN'MA

See this? Cracked, broken turkey hands with scraggy, scuffed fingers to boot. These fingers of mine were my prize possession, no really, young men would lean a'cross the table to whisper right in my ear bout what fine hands I had, so delicate and gentle and petite. Oh you may laugh, think what a sad old cow I must be being all vain and weepy eyed over ten little digits but God be damned they were all I had! I were never blessed like others with sweet smiles and round hips and flowing locks but my fingers could bring a young lad to his knees Oh aye they could - I'd stroke his chin and then nibble on the end of this index looking up at him like this, long slender fine appendages they were look at them! Argh!

Vanity has long surpassed me you'd think but no. If it weren't for this damn cold bringing me to my knees every year I tell em it's getting colder just you wait and see there'll be snow before November this year you mark my words and what do I get but pointing and laughing behind my back like old mother Hubbard but what do you see out that window my lad? Ha! This perishing cold... Throw another log on the fire won't don't you well don't look at me I'm too old to do the chopping nowadays that's your job now and I don't care if it's dark, it'll only get darker and what will your father day to find us burrowed in here together with naught but a few crumbling embers to guide him home? Oh don't worry now I know what your father's like he's been a miser since the day he was born all pinched face and screwy eyed and fists closed up so tight not a breath'd breeze through 'em but even he'd not deny us another log this time a'night with the snow falling down so thick. Fine then you sit there then my boy and do nothing while me and my fingers shrivel up. Ye gods you can see your breath in here look at it all puff puff puff out in the air you can hear my bones a'trembling and all...this COLD! Come on lad snuggle in here next to me oh my gods you're as cold as ice you're older than I am and I didn't know that'd even be possible I've got thin skin see you look at all the veins in my hands. But listen to me go on let us each warm the other let me hook my fingers into yours I know they're stiff but mayhap together we'll work some life in them yet.

Where could your father be it was dark when he left and dark again it is now that's six long hours he's been out looking for your mother now there's a woman to be a'feared of I know you think of your father as the cruel one but she's the one with the poison tongue to whisper whisper acid in your ear he's a meaner man since those two got hitched I'll tell you that with no mistaking and no lying. Don't fret little one it's no shame to hear ill spoke of your parents it's best you know who and what kind'of people they are so you can ready yourself for growing and living up in this house with them, defend yourself and pay no 'tention their wicked thoughts they can't keep to themselves and just you listen to me your gran'ma for she knows how to survive in these wicked days of ice in the heart and on the ground. Look now the ice is creeping in under the door round the frames of the windows we'll not last till morning without your father returning with a bucket of wood never mind your mother she'll fend for herself a resourceful one she is who grew up in these woods and knows them like the back of her hand. Are your lips cracking mine are all dried up worse than the flesh on my knuckles I feel so tired don't you now boy? You're not one for talking much now are you I know I talk and talk but you can interrupt me I don't mind not a bit it'd be nice to hear your voice it'd give me comfort so it would so I know it's not just me and my echoes in this room biting and sniping with the wind at my ears.

No words no none at all alright then you keep your tongue gran'ma's got you she gives you no blame for keeping your breath locked in in the warmth of your chest what little lies there left. You're getting heavy in my arms, heavy and stiff heavy and stiff sweet boy rest awhile gran'ma'll keep you safe I'll just rest my eyes for a moment not a moment too long your father'll be here soon and I'll bake fresh bread and heat nettle soup on a roaring fire a fire so hot it'll banish this cold this ice this...this...Stay close to me, stay close. Let's sleep. Sleep.

*GRAN'MA dies*