

WOMAN IN THE MOON by JENI WHITTAKER

CHARACTERS

GRAN - late 60s, half Native American
HER GRAND-DAUGHTER, LISA - 23 years old
HER GRAND-DAUGHTER, SASHA - 27 years old
ELLIE, LISA'S FRIEND
AMY, a cousin, Annie's daughter - 20 years old
AUNT GERDA - divorced. In her 40s.
AUNT MAGS- the oldest sister, in her late 40s, married to Frank
AUNT ANNIE - early 40s, married to Ernie

The play lasts roughly one to one hour fifteen minutes [dependent on the length of the physical theatre section]. It is easy to pick and choose scenes and characters to reduce the length.

Though mainly naturalistic in style, there is a physical theatre section half way through which involves all the characters, who enact the legend of Lone Bird - the Woman in the Moon.

The play would make a good examination script. All characters are well-developed and give opportunity for the use of Stanislavski's System as well as the contrast in playing styles offered by the physical theatre section.

Set at Lisa's engagement party, the play airs a variety of views about marriage and relationships. The different paths and choices one makes in life are brought into focus.

Further brief notes of clarification:

Simon, Gran's husband was killed in the Second World War. This makes the time in which the play is set the late 70's or early to mid 80's.

Gran's mother was native American and the story of Lone Bird is a traditional tale of the Chippewa tribe, who lived near the Great Lakes in North America.

The country in which the family live now is not particularly important. In my mind, it is one of the Scandinavian countries - somewhere where the winters are long and arrive early. But it could equally well be Canada or another part of North America, far from the homelands of the Chippewa.

Sasha and Lisa's parents, Peter and Rhoda, having been killed in an accident, Gran has brought them up. Rhoda was Gran's daughter.

Mags, Gerda and Annie are sisters to Lisa and Sasha's dead father, Peter.

This play was commissioned by a professional theatre company.

EXTRACT ONE

Sounds of excited chatter fill the darkness before the lights come up. When they do, slowly, but filling the stage with light, a young woman is revealed, casually dressed in jeans, surrounded by people all talking at once - some to each other, some of them trying to attract the attention of the young woman, Lisa, who is clearly the hub of the scene. A trestle, draped with a white cloth, is towards one side of the stage. Chairs rather haphazardly litter parts of the room, as if brought in and placed without arrangement.

Towards the front edge of the stage sits an older woman, in her late sixties. This is Gran. Sitting on the floor near her is another girl, Sasha, a few years older than Lisa. Sasha and Gran watch the animated group though they remain sitting still and do not participate. Finally Lisa makes wild gestures, jumping up and down, her face alive and happy, to silence the others. The crowd gradually fall quiet to listen.

The group in this scene need to be constantly forming and reforming into new configurations, always giving the impression of constant movement, whilst throwing up snippets of conversation amongst various individuals.

LISA Okay! Okay, everybody. Listen up! I want to ask Gran what she thinks. [*She moves towards the older woman in the corner. The others cluster close behind her.*] Gran, what 's your opinion? A May wedding? Or December.

GRAN It is your wedding, child.

LISA Yes, I know, but you must have an opinion. May is pretty well guaranteed good weather but December is kind of romantic.

AMY agreeing Hope in the winter months - that kind of thing.

ELLIE So beautiful. White against white. And the glittering snow. Oh, you must, Lisa, you must.

LISA But May is pretty too. And Greg favours May.

AMY That should count for something.

ELLIE Naah! Show him who's boss right away. Go with what *you* want.

LISA dreamily December's closer.

ELLIE Yeah. Why wait?

MAGS Never did believe in long engagements. They only lead to trouble.

ANNIE agreeing Too much time to get to know each other first.

GERDA How can there be too much time? Better to get to know each other properly than end up in the divorce courts.

LISA You're talking about yourself.

GERDA I'm talking from experience. Take it from me, Lisa ...

MAGS Oh, shut your mouth, Gerda. It's that big trap of yours got you into trouble in the first place. No wonder your husband left you.

GERDA not taking offence yet, shaking her head in bewilderment And for a little mouse of a thing with nothing to her.

MAGS Well ... Exactly.

GERDA glares at her Hmmph! [*She moves away towards the back of the group.*]

ELLIE Come on, everyone. Let's have peace shall we. This is about Lisa, not all of you.

AMY You're right. I'm going to start bringing in the food. [*She exits.*]

ELLIE Hey, Sasha - you're not contributing. What do you think? When should the wedding be?

LISA Yes, Sasha. Your opinion, please. Winter or Spring?

SASHA You know what I think. Go with your own feelings. But consider Greg's too.

ELLIE A wise remark.

LISA But like all wisdom - not necessarily very easy to follow.

ELLIE Typical of Sasha, though. On the fence. [*Calling over*] Hey, Sash ... anyone on the horizon for you?

SASHA dignified You know there is not.

MAGS to Annie Too sour-faced. No emotion, that one.

ANNIE She's always been an oddity.

MAGS A typical old maid, I'd say.

ANNIE darkly Or a late developer.

MAGS That's being too kind, in my opinion. No, Sasha is ...

GERDA coming in to the group, having overheard Different. She's different, that's all. What's wrong with that? She's her own person.

MAGS Whatever that means.

AMY breaking into the group, carrying a plate of sandwiches Mum, Aunt Mags, the men will be here soon. And Greg's family. Don't you think we ought to get ready? There's still lots to do.

ANNIE looking at her watch Oh, Heavens! [**Calling**] Lisa - quick, child, go and get changed. Everyone's due in half-an-hour.

LISA Right-o. Ellie - come with me?

ELLIE Too right, sweetie. Chance for a good girlie chat. [**They leave the stage together. Amy stands looking wistfully after them.**]

MAGS Well, that's probably a good thing. We might get something done now. Come on, all of you. Heave to. Sasha? You going to lend a hand or just sit there looking poker-faced all evening? [**Sasha gets to her feet.**] Goodness, dear, aren't you going to change?

SASHA I don't wear dresses. These are my smartest trousers. No one will be looking at me anyway.

MAGS Well they won't if you persist in disappearing into the background as you always do.

ANNIE who is walking by with a couple of chairs and overhears Leave her alone, Mags. Give me a hand with these chairs. [**To Gran. Talking to her as if she were a child.**] Sorry, dear. Mind if we put these chairs in a group with you? So that people can sit and talk together. You'd like to be part of things, wouldn't you?

SASHA sharp She's not old and she's certainly not stupid. Having a disease like Parkinson's doesn't make her an imbecile.

GRAN But I can't move around much. It's alright, darling - no need to protect me. Now help me up, I'll get out of your way.

ANNIE No need. You stay just where you are. We'll work around you.

Gran subsides, having half risen, gripping the sides of her chair.

SASHA quietly to Gran So much fuss over an engagement party.

AMY who overhears Well, it's a good excuse, isn't it? Any excuse for a party. Wish I could see what Lisa will be wearing. She always looks stunning.

SASHA She'll be down soon.

AMY Yes. Well... [**Pulling herself together.**] I love family get-togethers. Chance to catch up. Find out what you're all doing.

SASHA obediently What are you doing now, Amy?

AMY I'm at college. Doing a beautician's course.

SASHA genuinely surprised Really? I didn't have you down for that kind of career.

AMY What did you have me down for?...

EXTRACT TWO

Gran is left alone on the stage. When she talks about the past, her manner and voice is that of a young woman.

GRAN Simon came into the kitchen, quietly, looking around him in case Father should return. Turned out he'd been watching the backdoor for ages, waiting for me to be left alone. So he must have heard how it was for me - heard the shouting, the whup of the slender stick kept by the cupboard, me snivelling. I remember how ashamed I felt when he came in. I had snot running down my face, mingled with my hot tears. The red wheals of the cane flamed on my arm. The sleeve of my blouse, too short this many a long month, would not cover them, though I tried pulling them down. But he came over to me, so quiet, so tender, and laid his hand on mine as it grappled with the sleeve. Then he lifted my sodden face and kissed me - not demanding anything, just quietly. And I felt safe.

Voices are heard coming down the stairs. Lisa enters, followed by Ellie. She has changed into a dress and heels. She runs over towards her Gran, gives

her a kiss. Amy drifts over towards them and hovers a little apart.

AMY I love your dress, Lisa.

LISA *hardly a glance* Thanks, Amy. December it is Gran. I've decided. And Greg won't mind. It'll cheer us all up in the cold - give a focus to the dark months.

GRAN Will his family be able to travel here in the snow?

LISA It's not the olden days, Gran. They'll fly, I expect.

ELLIE And the roads are kept really clear now. It's not like it used to be.

GRAN Snow comes early in these parts.

LISA I know, Gran. I've lived here all my life too, remember? Snow starts in November.

ELLIE It'll be all right. People will come just the same.

GRAN City people.

LISA Greg's a city person. And so will I be.

AMY Perhaps I can come to visit you, Lisa. See those bright lights.

ELLIE Cruise the boys and the bars more like. That's what I'll be doing when I visit! And you won't be able to come, Lisa, 'cos you'll be a boring married person. All grown-up and wearing a pinny.

AMY Grown-up women don't wear pinnies anymore - they get their husbands to!

LISA *looking at Amy anew* Very good, Amy! But fat chance! Can't quite see Greg in a pinny. Anyway, just because I won't be cruising the boys and bars with you, doesn't mean that I won't be happy. Even in my pinny. All that cruising is kind of exhausting after a while.

ELLIE Not for us country girls. We've got all that healthy energy to burn. And, boy, we're gonna burn! Aren't we, Amy?

AMY *feeling accepted* Sure are!

Gerda and Mags enter, pause in the doorway and admire, then hurry forward.

EXTRACT THREE

... Into the front central area come Lisa, Ellie and the relatives. They are pushing and jostling, trying to establish poses for the camera. Plenty of noise. Under cover of the noise, clear the trestle table and other furniture away, except for a few chairs left near the sides. The group face the front, the imaginary Uncle Ernie being somewhere in the audience. Mags steps out to scan the group.

MAGS No, no - we can't see you properly. [***She pulls at one who is shorter than the others.***] That's better. Now all look at Lisa and smile. All right, Ernie? [***There is a flash.***] Ernie, you old fool, you missed me out. Wait till I'm back in position. [***She joins the group.***] Now. ... Ernie, NOW! [***And she flips her smile at Lisa full on.***]

LISA Uncle Ernie ... With Ellie, okay? Just me and my bestest friend in all the world.

The Relatives obediently step aside. A girly pose. Flash.

LISA Now my sister. My sister. [***Looking around.***] Sasha!

ALL *looking about* SASHA!

Sasha runs in from out of the house.

SASHA What? What is it?

LISA *affectionately* Photo, silly. That's all.

SASHA You know I hate my photo being taken.

ELLIE & LISA Oh, Saa -sha!

LISA Stop being so confrontational. This is special to me. Like you are, you silly thing.

Sasha steps into line with Lisa. All others move out of camera shot. The contrast between Lisa - bright face, smile, perky stance - and Sasha -

awkward, trying to look happy but not really succeeding, should be very apparent. Flash. All freeze.

GRAN Let me have a snap of you to keep, Simon said. Then you will be always with me. I haven't one, I answered. What, no snap? Not one? None, I said. I don't exist. **[Pause.]** My mother's people believed that the camera eats your soul; the picture is yourself forever captive. But I don't believe that. The picture makes you real. Without a picture, at least one, who would ever know I had been alive? No one had cared enough to make me real. Simon looked at me then, saying nothing except with his eyes....

EXTRACT FOUR

... **MAGS** Here we go again! the same old chestnuts, every family gathering. These young people don't want to be hearing them.

ELLIE We don't mind. We're busy taking notes!

AMY Yes, - what not to do when you're married.

ANNIE warningly Amy...

GERDA sourly, to Lisa, Amy and Ellie If you call what they have marriages. Mine, short as it was, was a marriage - while it lasted. Good sex and plenty of laughs.

MAGS Gerda!

Annie giggles. Mags glares at her.

GERDA Don't mind them, girls. **[Drawing the girls aside.]**Mags could never abide the S word - nor the deed, I suspect. Why else does Frank go fishing every week-end and holiday? Believe me, the secret of a successful marriage is in an active sex life.

LISA blushing a little I'll try to follow your advice, Aunt Gerda.

GERDA Just because my marriage didn't work, doesn't mean the recipe isn't good. I just happened to have a man who was never going to be content with just one woman. He liked plenty of variety, did Fred. He won't stay with Susan any more than he did with me.

MAGS Leave those young people alone, Gerda. Let's go and fetch some chairs to put in the garden. It seems a shame to waste this good weather.

ANNIE People can sit in or out then, can't they, Lisa?

LISA Absolutely. Their choice.

ANNIE Even at the evening do - it's so mild. When all the friends and neighbours arrive for the dancing, we'll need the extra room of the garden. Just hope the drink holds up.

MAGS Not too much drink, though. We don't want an orgy.

GERDA Hee hee!

MAGS ploughing on regardless of her mockery Frank's brought over some bottles of lemonade in the car - for when the alcohol's gone and people are getting thirsty.

During the last four speeches, the Aunts have been slowly exiting. They re-emerge with some chairs and arrange them at the sides. This happens during the following.

ELLIE Your relations are hysterical, Lisa.

LISA Never a dull moment with the terrible three, that's for sure! Sorry, Amy.

AMY I don't mind. Mum's not too bad on her own, but with her sisters....

ELLIE All that talk about sex! She has to be fifty if she's a day! Do you think we'll still want to have sex when we're fifty?

AMY Not likely! **[A shudder.]** Uugh.

LISA sombrely Makes you think, though, doesn't it?

ELLIE Hey you - you've gone all quiet. What's up? You getting cold feet yourself now?

LISA Not really. But I am beginning to realise what I'm letting myself in for. It's all a bit mind-boggling. Well, more than that - more ... awe-inspiring.

AMY That's a big word.

LISA It's a big idea. Marriage. A life partner.

ELLIE Is it what you want, Lisa?

LISA I think so. I don't want to be alone - to end up alone, like Gerda. I feel funny without someone else to share things with.

AMY Well then!

ANNIE *interrupting* Come on, you girls. We're not at a funeral. Greg will wonder what's happened when he walks in.

LISA Oh, Greg! Greg! [*As Annie leaves again.*] - You're right. I've just done the test ... Greg and Lisa! Sounds good! Sounds permanent!

GRAN In the end, we're all on our own. There are no guarantees. I thought I had a partner, someone to share with, but the war took him. Left me alone to bring up a child. And it wasn't easy. I couldn't turn to parents. I had left them back in the old place. And then ... [*She closes her eyes briefly against the memory.*] You rebuild your life. Each time you are blown down - you struggle up again. [*Again, she closes her eyes. Rocks slightly.*] How terrible it is to lose a child. The hurt of it is like a stone in the womb that never pushes into the light of day. A cold stone - heavy - but which rises occasionally when you least expect it, to block the lungs, to stop the breath in the throat. It is a physical thing - as real as giving birth but without that ... end. It is always there. But still you rebuild. Even with that burden, you push your face up - towards the light.

By now, the Aunts are all in, on the chairs, or standing near. Lisa is in the centre, with Amy and Ellie.

LISA Oh, now it's good, now it's all right again. Come on, Greg. Where are you?

AMY Yes, where are you Greg? We're all dying to meet you.

ELLIE And any hunky friends you might have.

LISA *laughing* Not today, I'm afraid. You'll have to come to visit us in the city to meet the hunky friends. Oh, you will come, won't you?

ELLIE 'Course I will. Soon as I can.

AMY Where's Sasha? Haven't seen her for a while.

LISA She'll be off on her ownsome somewhere. It's what she does.

AMY She's a strange one, isn't she? I don't find her easy to talk to, like you, Lisa.

At this point, Sasha enters, at speed, obviously excited.

SASHA Hey, everyone. They're here! The taxi's outside the door.

The group turn - various degrees of expectancy, excitement - and freeze. The lights fade. Then return on the area around Gran. Sasha is with her. She is crying and Gran is holding her hand.

SASHA *as if in answer to a question previously asked* Oh, it was - it was a lovely party - for Lisa. It's only me - I don't know what's wrong with me nowadays. I can't seem to be happy.

GRAN I wish your parents could have been here for it. Your Dad. And my lovely Rhoda.. Once, when you came in with the sweetpeas, I thought I heard her voice.

SASHA *touching her hand, with sympathy* Oh, Gran.... Well, Dad was well represented, anyway. All the sisters.

GRAN Yes. I found a family through Rhoda's marriage to your father. The first real family I've ever had.

SASHA You feel you belong! And you're so different from them. How can you feel you belong to those people?

GRAN Oh, they don't really accept me. They find me strange. But, for better or worse they are my tribe now. Now you, little one. What is the matter with you? Why cannot you take joy at your sister's happiness?

SASHA I'm selfish, aren't I?

GRAN *gently* Perhaps a little....self-absorbed.

SASHA Yes, it's true. I'm selfish and no one really likes me very much and they're right. I don't deserve to be liked.... and it's not as if I haven't tried - to be more like Lisa, that is. Only - people don't really like me... not like they always liked her.

GRAN Do you like them? [*Sasha shrugs awkwardly.*] You and Lisa - I have always seen you will have very different paths. Lisa needs a partner; it makes her complete.

SASHA She's normal. Whereas I'm not.

GRAN Do you want to be?

SASHA I want to be accepted, not whispered about behind people's backs. But then again, I wouldn't want to be Lisa. Dependent on a man for security.

GRAN That is Lisa's path. Beware of pride, child. Lisa's way is the way of the world. Because it is the normal way does not mean it is the lesser path. I too chose a man.

SASHA You have been alone as long as I have known you. You were a young woman, yet you never looked for another man.

GRAN There are not many Simons. And I have had you girls. You gave me my feeling of belonging to the world. Whatever path you choose, Sasha, you must be a part of the world. Why do you build fences around yourself?

SASHA Fences?

GRAN You are a writer - a lonely job. Do you want to be a good writer?

SASHA Of course I do.

GRAN Then you must embrace life.

SASHA I wait tables, surrounded by people. I go out with men.

GRAN And I've seen how you dress when you go out with them, when you face the world. Jeans, leather jacket, heavy boots ... You are putting up fences.

SASHA I want to be myself....

EXTRACT FIVE

GRAN *softly* Well, you truly are a lone bird, aren't you? Do you know that story? I will tell it to you when the time is right.

SASHA I love your stories.

GRAN You and Lisa, both. You always did. It is how I comforted you in the months after your parents' deaths.

SASHA You told us one every night.

GRAN *nodding* Because it gave you back a structure to your lives. Your world had been destroyed. The stories, told again and again, rebuilt the world for you, made it safe.

SASHA I understand that. They were all stories of your people, weren't they?

GRAN Of my mother's people. It is how they affirmed their existence in their increasingly threatened world. Those stories gave them roots. I thought they might do the same for you.

SASHA *excited* Oh, I remember the story of Lone Bird now. Is that the one you meant?

GRAN It is. You remind me of her.

The lights are changing now, coming back up onto a stage that has been cleared of the trestles, though it would be a good idea to leave some chairs at the sides, for use later.

SASHA Lone Bird's family were happy. Their younger daughter, White Cloud, had accepted the hand of Two Feathers - a strong warrior from the next village. The celebrations had gone on for days...

By the time she has finished this speech, Lisa and the others have come onto the stage, dressed in simple tunics allowing for easy movement. Lisa plays White Cloud. She is unmasked, but dressed in a white tunic. The others are masked and represent both men and women. Half masks, that leave the mouths free to speak.

As Sasha starts the story, the cast come on and establish a rhythm with drums and, if possible, other instruments - mostly percussive. Voices, if desired, could also be used...

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS

The starting-point for writing the play was an ancient native -American traditional legend 'The Woman in the Moon.' This is the story of Lone Bird, who eschews marriage and the traditional ways of the tribe and who is taken up by the moon herself to live there. It has links with other tales, such as that of many of the nymphs of Greek and Roman legend, who were often dedicated to Artemis, goddess of the moon and of hunting and who, pursued by ardent would-be lovers prayed to Artemis for help and were turned into bushes, or flowers or waterfalls, rather than giving in to a man. There is not the same pressure on a woman nowadays to follow the 'normal' path of marriage and children, but women who are 'different' are still looked at askance.

The play, then becomes a look at the different paths chosen by two sisters: Lisa is on the verge of marriage, Sasha is our modern 'Lone Bird.' In between, each of the other characters show different aspects of attitudes to marriage and relationships - with men. Ellie is Lisa's friend, a modern young woman 'on the hunt' for a man. Amy, Lisa's younger cousin, with her admiration for Lisa, will obviously go along the same lines, if it is in her power. Mags and Annie, two of the aunts, have traditional marriages - Annie is softer, a more maternal woman. Mags is the one who wears the trousers, organising her household and husband with ferocity. Gerda is divorced and bitter with it - full of opinions about men and relationships and about the importance of sex. Amongst their voices is interwoven, in monologue form, the story of Gran - ill-treated by her father and married to a kind man eventually but then widowed by the war whilst pregnant with Sasha and Lisa's mother. Then she loses this child, in a car accident, and ends up bringing up her two grand-children. Hardship has given Gran wisdom; she is equally happy with Lisa's and Sasha's choices in life and tries to give Sasha peace of mind about her own nature through the story of Lone Bird, a legend of her own people.

The Native American background to the play is important. The story of Lone Bird stresses the importance of marriage and children for the continuance of a tribe beset by hardships: long winters, wolves, bears and the cruelty of nature. The choice Lone Bird makes against this background has far deeper implications than now in our modern age where the 'tribe' is very much 'on top' of its world and not under threat. But even in those hard times, Lone Bird's decision to be alone is treated with respect; how much more should Sasha's decision, in a modern context, be tolerated. Sasha's 'strangeness' comes far more from her uneasiness with her own nature than from the feelings of others towards her. Gran tries to help her to come to terms with herself.

The style of the play is mainly naturalistic, with all of the characters given sufficient background and depth to repay a Stanislavskian approach. However, there are stylised features; the photograph section, for instance - the thoughts of Gran, in monologue form often, against the activity of the others and, particularly, the physical theatre section where the cast enact, masked, through dance, the story of Lone Bird.

CHARACTERS

GRAN - late 60s and half Native American. Gran's mother was Chippewa. She was a domestic servant to Gran's white father, who raped her on a regular basis and then punished her for leading him astray. Gran, the product of this union, was also punished by her father, who never acknowledged her. Eventually, Gran finds peace and

happiness with Simon, who is gentle and understanding with her. But Simon is killed in the war and Gran is left to bring up their child on her own. She moves as far away from where she has always lived as possible, to start afresh. Gran's upbringing has given her strength and wisdom. She brings up her own child, and then in time, her grand-children, with balance and love. Without a feeling of her own roots, she works hard at giving Sasha and Lisa a sense of belonging. Through doing this, she is trying to give herself a sense of belonging too. But it is clear that she is not entirely successful in this. She is still treated as an outsider; none of the family [who are her son-in-law's relations] are close to her. She remains a 'Lone Bird' herself, to the end - though she is perfectly happy with that. She seems to expect nothing more from life.

Gran should be played in two contrasting styles. In the modern period, when talking directly to others, she has Parkinson's, which makes her physically rather shaky, but her voice should be firm. When she is reminiscing, she becomes as if her younger self, and voice and actions should make this clear.

LISA - aged 23, is engaged to be married to Greg. She has an unspecified City job, which has taken her away from her small-town roots. From Amy's attitude to her, it is clear that job-wise Lisa is successful - a high-flyer. But she is a old-fashioned girl at heart. She sees herself with children and as a home-maker; one wonders if the job won't perhaps go when she becomes a mother. Though she seems confident and secure, when Greg looks as though he may not show up, she suffers a crisis of confidence which peels away that veneer. She clearly needs her man to make her feel secure in the world. Lisa's character is usually bright and bubbly, and her voice and manner should reflect this.

SASHA - aged 27. Though older than Lisa, Sasha is far less secure in her own skin, mainly because of her inner torment over her sexuality. It is not clear whether she has explored that sexuality at all - I think not. She has suppressed her inclinations. A dreamer, Sasha writes poetry but is realistic enough to realise that she will probably never make a living out of writing. Her waitressing job is the easy option, just as her staying at home with Gran and not leaving her small-town roots is also the easy option. This is not laziness but rather an inability to make decisions about herself, because of her fear of allowing her true self to show.

To show her lack of ease with herself, Sasha needs to come over as clumsy and awkward - big gangly movements, sloped shoulders, ducked head. In fact, though older, she should come over as younger than Lisa, who knows who she is. Sasha is still very emotionally immature, though she is the one who is closer to Gran, probably because her need of Gran and the security she provides is very necessary to her still.

ELLIE - 23, a school-friend of Lisa's. She is a supportive friend, confident with herself. There seems to be a stronger core than Lisa has- perhaps fiercer is more it; we should notice this when she says she'll kill Greg if he breaks the relationship now. There is wisdom in Lisa; she gives good advice to Amy and is kind to the younger girl. A basically steady person, though she is also there to show the young single woman of today.

AMY - aged 20. A young cousin of Lisa and Sasha, she idolises Lisa, who is pretty and has made a success of her life - or so she feels. She has always been ignored by Lisa, having been too young to be noticed at previous family get-togethers, but this time, she makes an amusing remark and Lisa 'sees' her. After this, Amy quickly blossoms as she visibly grows in confidence. After a chat with Ellie at the end, Amy is ready to set her sights higher than before. Perhaps she will try to be a vet after all.

AUNT GERDA. She is the middle one of the three sisters. Her marriage has failed but she still obsesses about it. She is by far the raunchiest of the three sisters and is not afraid to talk about sex or to give her opinions about marriage to the prospective bride, Lisa. Her out-spokenness becomes embarrassing towards the end when she is drunk. She is the sort of drunk who feels morose and full of self-pity. Really she is a pitiful

character with the saving grace of being completely honest. Don't overdo the drunkenness - a slight slurring of her words is probably enough.

AUNT ANNIE. She is Amy's mother and the youngest of the three sisters. Rather under Mags' influence, she lacks Mags' hard edge and bossiness, though she catches a bit of that organising side during the first half. There is warmth to Annie, though, and a softness which should show in her face and actions and less abrasive voice. She seems to have a happy marriage with her husband Ernie.

AUNT MAGS, The eldest and the bossiest of the sisters. She likes to organise and have everything running smoothly. Annie is the one she feels is closest to her; they share many of the same values and Mags approves of Annie's organising ability, even if she doesn't think she organises her husband as efficiently as she might. Mags' Frank is clearly hen-pecked. There is a hint, expertly glossed over, as families do, that Gerda might have had a fling with Frank. Certainly Gerda suggests that Mags does not like sex. She is very strait-laced, quick to show disapproval. Her voice should be definite, rather strident and movement also brusque and managing.

SETTING

Setting needs to be simple, as we move from inside to outside and have a physical theatre section which needs accommodation. The script indicates where such furnishings as are needed are moved. Gran's area - she is onstage throughout - needs to be separated from the rest. If you have an apron, this would answer the problem. Otherwise, just make sure that she is right near the front, to one side and is separated at times from the rest of the stage by lighting. Her position emphasises her isolation from the rest of the 'tribe.' ...