

TRAPPED BY A STROKE

By Deborah Karczewski

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CAST: one female

(The stage is preferably preset with two chairs. If contest rules limit access to only one chair, the actress can simply stand and move her position to indicate a change in character. MARCY enters stage right and focuses on the stage left chair in which SHE will later sit when playing EMILIA.)

MARCY

Uh...Hello? Mrs. Wenders?...Emilia Wenders? *(MARLA nervously talks to someone who obviously cannot talk back.)* Um...hi. *(SHE approaches the stage right chair.)* Um...nice room... You have a comfy room, Mrs. Wenders – uh – Emilia. It's cheerful. I see you have a lovely view from your window. Oh look, you have a dogwood tree. Pretty flowers. I love dogwood flowers. I'm beginning to ramble, aren't I? Sorry.

(sits)

The nurses told me that you wouldn't be able to talk to me. They warned me that you wouldn't be able to look at me, either- might not even know that I was here. I was totally prepared. At least I thought I was...but maybe this is a mistake. Oh well...at least I can keep an old woman company. Right? I mean, what have I got to lose? An hour or so? Maybe you'd just like to have someone around...someone to spend a little time with you. Even if you don't understand what's going on, maybe you'd just like a little company. Right? A little human contact, maybe.

OK...so...here we are. *(After an awkward pause MARCY cracks. SHE starts to cry as though SHE has been keeping in her pain for a very long time.)* This is not what I envisioned at all. I've waited for so long, and now that I've found you...I can't...talk to you. I can't reach you. It's just not fair!

(After a few sobs, MARCY pulls herself together and calms down a bit.) I'm sorry. It's not your fault. It's not like you had a stroke on purpose. *(bitter laugh)* I'm pretty certain you didn't wake up and say, "Gee Emilia, I think I'll have a stroke today. Maybe that way, if my granddaughter Marcy ever finds me, I'll be able to avoid any kind of reunion. Then I'll never have to tell her anything about her mother and why she decided to give her baby up."

Grandma Emilia – it's me! It's Marcy! Well, you probably didn't know me as "Marcy," did you? I don't think my mother even named me. Did she? Oh, do you remember anything, Grandma? Do you? Do you remember your daughter, Fran? She had a baby, a baby girl. I'm that baby, Grandma. I'm Marcy!

(Rises angrily and starts to wander) Oh, for heaven's sake. This is a waste of time! I spend every waking moment for the last three years trying to find my mother... Then, my parents – my adoptive parents – spend all sorts of money trying to help me... And then I find out that my biological mother committed suicide when I was around two! Nice – huh? She decided to mess up my life not once, but twice! So then, after my parents spend another whole bundle on therapy for me, I get this new idea: "So what if my loser of a mother is dead? She probably wouldn't have wanted to see me anyway. So, why not try to find somebody else in the family?"

My mom and dad have been so great. They even hired a private detective for me. **(MARCY returns to her seat.)** You know what, Grandma? I'm a very lucky girl. How many people have parents who are willing to take in a little baby, raise her as their own, spend all sorts of money on therapy, and even help her to look for her biological family? I really love them. **(big pause)** So – long story short – the only known living relative is you. And you don't even know I'm here.

I know it's not your fault, Grandma Emilia. It's just that there's so much I want to know! Do you remember your daughter, Fran Wenders? What was she like? Why did she give me up? Why did you let her give me up? Did she ever think about me? Did you? **(MARCY reaches her hands toward the stage left chair and pantomimes holding Emilia's two hands. SHE speaks softly and pleadingly.)** Oh Grandma, do you even know I'm here?

(MARCY freezes for a few seconds. Then, keeping her hands extended toward the center of the two chairs, SHE moves to the stage left chair and "becomes" Emilia Wenders. SHE sits, hunched, old, staring at her lap. With her hands lifted as if still being held by her granddaughter, MARCY. SHE begins in a fragile, aged voice.)

EMILIA

Oh, my sweet baby. Yes Marcy, I know you're here. If only you had found me three short months ago, I would have hugged you as tight as could be. I would have cried...I would have laughed...I would have...Marcy, I think I would have danced a jig!

I can feel you touching me, my sweet granddaughter. If I could only squeeze these hands. If I could only let you know that I hear you...that I understand you.

Well, I can imagine it, anyway. This cursed body may have trapped me inside, but it can't keep me from imagining. Do you know what it's like to be held prisoner in a broken shell of a body? No, of course you don't, my sweet baby. I hope you never do. I may look like a big 'ol scoop of mashed potatoes on the outside, but by golly, I'm still Mrs. Emilia Wenders on the inside. Nobody can take that away from me. Not yet anyway.

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