

Audition descriptions for *Tending to Grace – The Play*

(Character ages are what we are playing them in the production. Anyone can try out for a role if they are younger or older than the age of the character. Some minor roles could be played by the same actor.)

Cornelia – sensitive, withdrawn girl, 14 yrs. old, has had a tough life with her mom and boyfriend. People think she’s a dimwit because she stutters, but she’s very bright.

Teacher – woman or man, any age

Allison – 14 yr. old girl, Cornelia’s classmate

Sam – 14 yr. old boy, Cornelia’s classmate

Betsy – 14 yr. old girl, Cornelia’s classmate

Lenore – fragile woman in her 30’s, smokes & drinks, Cornelia’s mom, can’t take care of her daughter

Joe – irresponsible, selfish man in his 30’s, Lenore’s boyfriend, doesn’t understand or like Cornelia

Agatha Thornhill – Cornelia’s strong, eccentric great aunt, in her 50’s

Moss – a man in his 40’s or 50’s, knows Agatha

Warm Milk (librarian) – a soft, kind woman, any age

Waitress – impatient, lacks compassion woman or man, any age

Bo – a friendly girl, 14ish, who befriends Cornelia, afraid of her pa, can’t read

Pete – abusive, gruff man in his 30’s, Bo’s pa, doesn’t want Cornelia teaching his daughter to read

Bank Clerk – kind woman or man, any age

Frog Race Commissioner – impatient boy or girl, 10ish, MC of frog race

Kids – 4-5 kids in frog race, ages 8-10 (can be same actors as Cornelia’s classmates and Bo’s siblings)

Bo’s ma – kind, compassionate woman in her 30’s, afraid of her husband

Bo’s brother & sister – young boy & girl under 10 (no lines)

Principal – man or woman, any age, dealing with one more problem

Mrs./Mr. Paul – woman or man, new English teacher, by the book personality

Mrs./Mr. Browne – man or woman, Honors English teacher, willing to give Cornelia a chance

Secretary – woman, any age (no lines)

Audition Script - Cornelia

Cornelia: My teacher is a look-away. I am a bookworm, a bibliophile, a passionate lover of books. I know metaphor and active voice and poetic meter, and I understand that the difference between the right word and the almost right word, as Samuel Clemens said, is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

But I don't talk so no one knows. All they see are the days I miss school, thirty-five one year, twenty-seven the next, forty-two the year after that. I am a silent red flag, and they send me to their counselors and they ask me, "When are you going to talk about it, Cornelia?" I curl myself into a ball and squish the feelings down to my toes and they don't know what to make of me so they send me back to this class where we get the watered-down *Tom Sawyer* with pages stripped of soul and sentences as straight and flat as a train wreck.

Audition Script - Cornelia - Monologue

(Please memorize one of these monologues and be ready to recite as part of the audition.)

Cornelia: We drive out Route 6 on a silent day at the end of May, my mother, the boyfriend, and I. We pass villages with daisies at the doorsteps and laundry hung in soft rows of bleached white. I want to jump out of the car as it rushes along and wrap myself in a row of sheets hanging so low their feet tap the grass. I want to hide because my life, if it were a clothesline, would be the one with a sweater dangling by one sleeve, a blanket dragging in the mud, and a sock, unpaired and alone, tumbling to the road with the wind at its heel.

Cornelia: Turning to stone is hard work. First you have to let the anger climb up from deep within you and as it turns over and over and rises up through your chest, you have to clamp your teeth over it and push it back down. Then you sort of imagine yourself getting real heavy, folding over onto yourself, getting thick so nothing can reach the spot far inside that hasn't turned hard yet. And you know that if you get it right, you're not so afraid.

Audition Script - Cornelia, Agatha

Agatha: (To **Cornelia**.) What's your name? (**Cornelia** looks away, **Agatha** waits impatiently.) Don't you talk?

(**Cornelia** tears up, pretending to swat a fly near her eyes. **Agatha** pulls a sugar cube out of her overall pocket and pops it into her mouth.)

Agatha: Want one? (**Cornelia** shakes her head.) There are those who'd say a girl who don't talk is a dimwit. Are you a dimwit? (**Cornelia** angrily shakes her head, then looks out at the "mountain" again.) You know what I say? I say that when you got a voice, you darn well better tell the world who you are. Or somebody else will.

Cornelia: (Takes a deep breath.) C-c-c-c-c...

Agatha: (Pulls out another sugar cube and crunches noisily.) We'll be bored as two pigs in a pen if I do all the talkin' around here.

Cornelia: C-c-c-c...C-c-cornelia. (She looks at her feet, her eyes brimming with tears.)

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Agatha: Only God's perfect. And sometimes I'm not sure about even that. (She chomps on a sugar cube.) Sit down and rest a bit. (She points to a chair.)

(**Cornelia** stacks an assortment of imaginary dishes and pushes them to one side. She wipes the chair with the back of her hand. She looks up and notices the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling.)

Agatha: Well, let's see now. (She unwraps the binoculars from her neck and flops them on the table.) How 'bout some tea? (She fills an imaginary pot with water and sets it on the stove.) You can call me Agatha. (She pulls a root from a pot on the counter and begins shaving slices of it with a large knife.) I'm the sister of your grandmother. I guess that's right. But I don't bother too much with relatives. Most of them bore me to death. My sister, she's dead now, but when she was livin', she couldn't tell the upside of a turnip. How 'bout you?

Cornelia: (Shrugs.)

Agatha: Later on, if you feel like stayin', I could use some gardening help. (She puts the root slices into the pot on the stove. She cuts three fat slices of round dark bread and places them in front of **Cornelia** with a jar of something brown

and sticky. Then she pulls a wheel of cheese from the refrigerator and cuts a pie-shaped slice and hands it to **Cornelia**.)

Cornelia: (Wipes the dust off the edge of the plate with her thumb, slathers the bread with the sticky spread and takes a bite.)

Agatha: Molasses. Ever have it before? (**Cornelia** shakes her head.) Only one way to eat homemade bread – smothered in molasses. (She dips her finger in the jar and scoops out a lump of molasses and plunks it in her mouth.)

(**Cornelia** checks the cheese for mold, then places a sliver on her tongue. **Agatha** pours two cups of tea and sits in the chair across from **Cornelia**. **Agatha** slurps her tea like a child. **Cornelia** sips her tea slowly.)

Agatha: That's sassafras. It's good for you.

Cornelia: Any c-c-coffee?

Agatha: Never drink the stuff.

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Cornelia: (Scratching at the bites on her arms.) Why d-d-don't you f-f-f-fix this house?

Agatha: What's the matter with it? (She opens a canning jar of some sort of green goo and dumps it into another pan on the stove, flies buzz around her hand as she stirs.)

Cornelia: H-h-haven't you noticed? The s-s-s-screens have holes. Look at these bugs.

Agatha: Then fix them. (She ladles mushrooms onto her plate and spoons some of the green mixture beside them.) Fishin' line in the barn. Rug needles in the sewin' box back of that cupboard there. Make a spider web kind of thing. The time you spend readin', you could be fixin' those screens. (She puts the plate on the table and sits.)

(**Cornelia** stares at **Agatha's** plate.)

Agatha: They're fiddleheads. (She takes a few bites.) Ferns. Want some?

Cornelia: (Shakes her head.) I'll b-b-be outside w-w-waiting for my m-mother.

(Agatha freezes. Cornelia stands center stage, spotlight on her.)

Cornelia: The boyfriend doesn't know about frozen waffles. He doesn't know that when you stack them five high and dust them with cinnamon and powdered sugar, they will get my mother out of bed on a cold afternoon. The boyfriend doesn't know that a cigarette and a cup of coffee calm her when she starts to shake, and he doesn't know that watching *I Love Lucy* reruns gets her to laugh and improves the day immensely.

Audition Script - Joe, Lenore, Cornelia, Agatha

Lenore: Hey, Corns?

Joe: Why don't she never talk? (**Lenore** flicks her imaginary cigarette, and shrugs.) Come on, babe. Let's me and you go to Vegas. (**Lenore** laughs.) I'm serious, babe.

Lenore: (Stops laughing.) What about Corns?

Joe: We can't take no kid to Vegas. (**Cornelia** walks back in from stage right and stands awkwardly by the table.) Your ma and me think we'll head out to Vegas. What do you think of that? (**Cornelia** folds her arms and turns away.) Why don't you never answer me, girl? (**Cornelia** doesn't answer.) I'm talking to you. Don't you sass me.

(Lights dim. Lenore and Joe freeze. Spotlight on Cornelia.)

Cornelia: (To the audience.) Sass, I want to point out, means talking back. I'm not talking at all.

(Lights back up. Lenore and Joe unfreeze.)

Lenore: Leave her be, Joe. She don't talk to nobody.

Joe: She dang well better talk.

(The stage goes dark. Spotlight on Cornelia.)

Cornelia: Turning to stone is hard work. First you have to let the anger climb up from deep within you and as it turns over and over and rises up through your chest, you have to clamp your teeth over it and push it back down. Then you sort of imagine yourself getting real heavy, folding over onto yourself, getting thick so nothing can reach the spot far inside that hasn't turned hard yet. And you know that if you get it right, you're not so afraid.

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Joe: (Yells.) This it? You got the wrong house, Lenore. (**Cornelia** hangs back.)

Lenore: Come on, Corns. It's not going to be for that long. Just till Joe and me get settled.

(**Lenore** pushes the ivy aside and taps lightly at the door. **Agatha** appears from stage right, her gray hair twisted into a braid and roped around her head. Binoculars thump against her chest. **Lenore** appears startled when she sees her.)

Lenore: Agatha.

Agatha: (Nods toward **Joe**, but not taking her eyes off **Cornelia**.) Tell him to turn that noise off.

(**Lenore** looks unsure about what she should do. She steps forward like she is about to hug **Agatha**, but then changes her mind and turns toward **Joe**. **Joe** mimes turning down the car radio.)

Lenore: Your phone isn't working. (She giggles nervously.) I need someone to take her for a while. (**Agatha** doesn't respond, so **Lenore** continues.) It ain't easy for me. Her father's gone. Joe says we can make a better start in Vegas. But it ain't no place for a kid.

(There's a long pause. Everyone is clearly uncomfortable.)

Agatha: (Stares at **Lenore**.) Something the matter with your brain, Lenore?

Lenore: (Puts her hand lightly on **Cornelia's** arm.) Me and Joe, we'll come get her quick as we can.

Agatha: (Looks over at **Joe**.) You ain't pickin' them no better, are you?

(**Lenore** looks down. **Agatha** looks at **Cornelia**. **Cornelia** looks out toward the audience, to the “mountain”.)

Agatha: Get the hel...heck out of here, Lenore.

(**Lenore** and **Joe** exit stage left.)

Agatha: (To **Cornelia**.) What’s your name? (**Cornelia** looks away, **Agatha** waits impatiently.) Don’t you talk?

(**Cornelia** tears up, pretending to swat a fly near her eyes. **Agatha** pulls a sugar cube out of her overall pocket and pops it into her mouth.)

Agatha: Want one? (**Cornelia** shakes her head.) There are those who’d say a girl who don’t talk is a dimwit. Are you a dimwit? (**Cornelia** angrily shakes her head, then looks out at the “mountain” again.) You know what I say? I say that when you got a voice, you darn well better tell the world who you are. Or somebody else will.

Cornelia: (Takes a deep breath.) C-c-c-c-c...

Agatha: (Pulls out another sugar cube and crunches noisily.) We’ll be bored as two pigs in a pen if I do all the talkin’ around here.

Cornelia: C-c-c-c...C-c-cornelia. (She looks at her feet, her eyes brimming with tears.)

Audition Script -Pete, Bo, Agatha, Cornelia

Pete: (He looks at everyone and sees **Bo**.) What are you doing here?

Bo: Pa! (She covers the book she's reading.)

Agatha: (She stands.) Pete. (**Cornelia** grabs **Bo**'s hand.)

Pete: (He ignores **Agatha** and **Cornelia**.) No one said you could come here!

Cornelia: St-st-stop yelling. (**Pete** slowly turns and stares at her.)

Agatha: This is my niece, Pete. Now you be calmin' down.

Pete: Calm down? What are you talking about? No one said she could come here. What's going on, anyway? (He looks from **Bo** to her book, to her pen and paper, to **Agatha**.)

Cornelia: (She blurts out.) She's l-l-learning to read. (She grabs **Bo** tighter.)

Pete: Reading? She reads just fine. (He turns to **Agatha**.) What is this, you think we need some kind of charity? We don't need it, that's for damn sure. (He looks at **Bo**.) Get out to the car. Now!

Cornelia: She can't r-r-r-read hardly at all. She c-c-c-c-could never go to college reading like that.

Pete: (He laughs.) College? You think I got money to send a *girl* to college? (He grabs **Bo**'s arm and marches her out the door.)

Cornelia: (In disbelief, looks at **Agatha** who is now slumped in her chair, and runs outside, stage left.) J-j-j-just wait. She'll go to college. J-just wait!

Audition Script -Bo's Ma, Cornelia

Cornelia: (She walks tentatively to Bo's house, looking behind her to be sure Bo's pa isn't around.) Is B-b-b-bo here?

Bo's ma: (She looks **Cornelia** over.) You Lenore's girl? (**Cornelia** nods.) Bo told me you're at Agatha's. You look just like your mother. Like Agatha, too. Come on in. I've got something for you. (As they walk into the house, **Bo's ma** continues talking.) Bo's out in the back with her brother. I baked this morning. (She pulls off a checked towel from a cake and gives it to **Cornelia**.) There's no frosting on it so it won't get all over everything. Would you like a piece? I've got another. Have a seat. (She points to a chair at the kitchen table, while the **girl** peeks at **Cornelia** from behind her **ma**.) All those potatoes. Agatha really helped us over the winter. My husband found a job, so things are better now. You can tell Agatha. And tell her I appreciate the vegetables Bo brings home, I surely do. (She cuts a piece of cake and lays it in front of **Cornelia**.) How's your mother? (**Cornelia** shrugs.) She still the same? (**Cornelia** nods.) She'll come around. Sometimes it takes a while. (She smiles at **Cornelia**.)

(Lights dim. Spotlight on Cornelia. Bo's ma and girl freeze.)

Cornelia: I'm not so sure I should have to wait at all. I'm pretty sick of waiting, actually. Bo is lucky to have a mother like this. They both have the same kindness. (She takes another bite of cake.)

(Lights come back up. Bo's ma and child unfreeze.)

Cornelia: Th-th-thank you for the c-c-cake. (She gets up to leave.)

Bo's ma: Remember to thank Agatha for me. (**Cornelia** nods.) Bye then. Come back soon. (**Cornelia** nods again and walks outside.)

Audition Script -Warm Milk, Cornelia

Warm Milk: (Stands behind podium, looking at **Cornelia**.) Can I help you with something? (**Cornelia** shakes her head and smiles.) There's a shelf over there you might like to look at for school. (She points and smiles at **Cornelia**.)

(**Cornelia** walks over to shelf of books and picks out *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She sits in a chair and reads. After a few minutes, **Warm Milk** walks over to **Cornelia**.)

Warm Milk: Excuse me? (She taps **Cornelia's** shoulder.) We're closing now. Would you like to take that with you? Oh, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. My favorite. (**Cornelia** startled, jumps a little.) It's after eight. You can take that home, you know. (She smiles.)

Cornelia: (She shakes her head and swallows her voice, leaving the book on the desk.)

(Lights dim. Spotlight on **Cornelia**.)

Cornelia: I don't have a library card. To get one, I'd have to tell her my name. I am a flower folding into myself, my petals wrapped tight.

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Warm Milk: Oh, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. What a great book! Do you have a library card? (**Cornelia** shakes her head.) You've been in here before, haven't you? (She smiles and **Cornelia** nods.) Well then, it will only take a minute. Your name, please? (**Cornelia** freezes and holds her breath, looking pained.) I need your name.

Cornelia: Ah-ah-ah-ah. (She presses her foot into the floor.) C-c-c...(She stops and starts over.) C-c-cornelia Th-th-th-thornhill. (She looks down and forces her gaze up. Warm Milk is not looking away.)

Audition Script - Allison, Betsy, Teacher, Sam

Allison: (Reads and stumbles in a few places.) It was Monday morning and Tom Sawyer was miserable. He was always miserable on Monday mornings because it meant he had to go to school.

(Some kids grunt. Some kids giggle.)

Betsy: (Her voice, strong and supple as a dancer.) Tom did play hooky and he had a very good time. He got home barely in time to help Jim. At least he was there in time to tell his adventures to Jim while Jim did three-fourths of the work.

(When **Betsy** finishes, the **teacher** looks at **Cornelia**, her eyes wide.)

Teacher: (To **Cornelia** in a high pitch, singsongy voice.) Cornelia, will you be reading today?

(**The kids** turn to look at **Cornelia**. **Cornelia** shakes her head and looks at her feet.)

Sam: Hey, no one else gets a choice. Why do we always have to read, but Cornelia doesn't? That's not fair!

Betsy: Yeah, that's not fair!

Sam: Teacher's pet!

Allison: Leave her alone!

Audition Script - Moss, Agatha

Moss: Agatha! You ladies need a hand?

Agatha: (She plants her feet firmly, and scowls.) You stop just to give me help, Moss?

Moss: (Laughs.) Sure.

Agatha: Well, the job's already done. Two chairs for my garden.

Moss: I did want to talk to you about that woodlot, Agatha. You gonna sell it to me this year?

Agatha: (Snorts.) I knew there was more. I got the same answer I gave you last year, Moss. No!

Moss: You can make a good pocket of cash off it—I keep telling you that, Agatha.

Agatha: And I keep telling you, I'm not lettin' no one buy my land.

Moss: (Takes off his cap and wipes his forehead with his arm.) Your house, Agatha, it could surely use a little money put into it. Be a shame to let an old place like that go.

Agatha: My business, not yours.

Moss: (Winks at **Cornelia**) I'm Moss, Moss Jackson. (He reaches out to shake **Cornelia's** hand.) I own the land right up to Agatha's. Isn't that right, Agatha? (He looks at **Agatha** and back at **Cornelia**.) And you're?

Cornelia: Ummm. (She breathes deeply and loops her thumbs in her belt loops, pulling until they are red as cherries.) C-c-c-c...

Moss: (He grins, then chuckles.) Cat got your tongue?

(**Agatha** is looking straight at **Cornelia**. She is not chuckling.)

Cornelia: (feels like a stone that's sinking) C-c-c-c-c...

Moss: (He looks down, then turns to **Agatha**.) You change your mind on that woodlot, you give me a call now, you hear? (He hurries to his truck, climbs in, and drives off.)

Audition Script - Waitress, Agatha, and Cornelia

Agatha: I could use some ice cream. Hal's Ice Cream is right over there. What do you say? (**Cornelia** nods excitedly.)

Waitress: What can I get you?

Agatha: Let's see. Do you want to order first, Cornelia?

(**Cornelia** shakes her head quickly, turning herself to stone. The **waitress** taps her pencil against her pad, growing impatient.)

Agatha: All right then. (She looks around to see what others are eating, then at the sign with flavors.) Yes, that's it. I'll have a hot fudge sundae with strawberry ice cream, whipped cream, and nuts. Extra nuts. A large sundae. Extra large. (She chuckles, the feather on her purple hat bobbing.)

Waitress: (Turns to **Cornelia**.) What will you have?

Cornelia: (Turns to **Agatha** and whispers.) Order for m-m-m-me.

Agatha: (In a voice three times louder than Cornelia's.) No. You got to make your own way. (She rustles through her pockets looking for money.)

Waitress: I don't care who orders, but somebody's got to. (She looks at the clock.)

Cornelia: C-c-c-c-o...(The **waitress** sighs and taps her pencil.) C-c-c-c...

Waitress: Well, make up your mind - I haven't got all day, you know. (She looks away.)

Cornelia: C-c-c-o...

Waitress: Chocolate? (She taps her pencil faster.) Is that what you're trying to say? Chocolate? (**Cornelia** shakes her head miserably and looks up at **Agatha**. **Agatha** looks straight back.)

Cornelia: No. Not ch-ch-ch-... (The **waitress** rolls her eyes.)

Waitress: Is there something the matter with you? (**Cornelia** looks down.) Can you please order for this girl? (She looks at **Agatha**, and **Agatha** shakes her head.)

Cornelia: (Barely a whisper.) Strawberry.

Waitress: (Loudly for everyone to hear.) Is this some kind of a joke? Don't think I don't have enough to do.

(Lights dim. Spotlight on Cornelia.)

Cornelia: Where's my mother? I hate strawberry ice cream.

Audition Script - Bank Clerk, Agatha, Cornelia

Clerk: Next!

Agatha: (Walks up to the counter and whispers.) I need your help readin' these. I ain't got glasses. (She places four bills and four blank checks on the counter.)

Clerk: Sure is hot out there, isn't it, Agatha? (**Agatha** nods.)

(The **clerk** picks up the blank checks and rolls them into her typewriter. She types and when she's done, she hands the typed checks back to **Agatha**.)

Clerk: You can sign all of these, Mrs. Thornhill. But there's not enough in the account for this one. (She points to one of the bills.)

Agatha: I'll be skippin' that one for another month, then, Betty. (She stuffs the telephone bill into the pocket of her overalls, and turns to leave. She nods to **Pete** as they walk past.) **Pete.** (The man grunts.)

Cornelia: (As they begin to walk to center stage.) This is a t-t-terrible amount of work, coming here like this to write bills.

Agatha: Always is. That's why I was tellin' you I only do it once a month.

Audition Script - Frog Commissioner, Cornelia, Boy

Frog Commissioner: (Speaking to **Cornelia**.) Name please. (**Cornelia** doesn't answer, so he looks up.) I said, name, please.

Cornelia: Ummmmm. (She looks for **Bo** in the crowd, a **boy** walks over with a huge frog.)

Boy: What's going on?

Frog Commissioner: If you want to race, I need your name. Are you going to race or not?

Cornelia: C-c-c-c-c...

Frog Commissioner: (He looks unbelieving, then laughs.) What's the matter, forget your own name?

Cornelia: (She takes a breath and laughs, then spells her name.) C-O-R-N-E-L-I-A.

(There's a circle of kids on their knees holding their frogs. **Cornelia** joins them. The kids are having trouble controlling their frogs. **Frog Commissioner** walks over with his clipboard.)

Frog Commissioner: (He looks at **Cornelia**.) Get ready! Go!

Audition Script –Bo, Cornelia

Bo: The lady that lives here. Is she here? (**Cornelia** shakes her head, still confused.) My mother made this for her. (She hands **Cornelia** the box and looks behind her again. **Cornelia** takes the box and looks under the towel. She sees two loaves of homemade bread nested close.) My ma is thankin' the Crow Lady for the potatoes. (She hands **Cornelia** a letter.) You're not scared of her or nothing? (**Cornelia** just stares at the bread, not knowing how to respond.) Lots of kids hold their breath when they walk past here. They say she's looney. (She pushes her bangs out of her face.) But I don't think so. She brings us stuff. (She looks out at the road behind her.) I been here too long. My pa will whip me real bad if he knows I'm here. My ma has to sneak sometimes. (She turns to go.) Don't tell nobody it was me that brought it. You won't, will you?

Cornelia: I d-d-d-d-don't even kn-kn-kn-know who you are.

Bo: (Looks at **Cornelia** for a few seconds.) Don't say nothing. My pa's gonna beat my tail if you tell. (She runs off toward the road, stage left.)

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Bo: (Laughs.) Have you ever seen a frog so big? (She holds out a frog the size of one of her boots.)

Cornelia: (She holds a towel in front of her face) Ugh.

Bo: Oh, don't worry none. (She giggles.) He won't hurt you. (She puts the frog in a canvas bag.) There's a race at the school on Friday. I caught this big guy in the creek across the road. Want to come race him? (**Cornelia** shakes her head and hangs more laundry.) How come you never talk to the Crow Lady and me or nothing? (**Cornelia** shrugs.) This is really going to be fun, you know. It's a frog race.

Cornelia: No th-th-thanks. (She reaches for some socks.)

Bo: What can be more fun than racin' a frog?

Cornelia: (Hangs socks on the line.) Cl-cl-cl-climbing that m-m-m-m-mountain. (She nods to the mountain.)

Bo: It's far up there. My pa would kill me if I went. (She swings her bag over her shoulder.) I know another mountain that's closer. I'll take you there if you don't tell anyone and if you promise to go to the frog race. (**Cornelia** thinks on that.) My name's Bo. (She holds out her hand. **Cornelia** checks it for frog goo.)

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Cornelia: (She's out of breath from running.) Wh-wh-where's the m-mountain? (**Bo** points to the church steeple.) That's no m-m-mountain. We just ran three miles. (She bends over, catching her breath.)

Bo: (Laughs.) It is so.

Cornelia: (She stands straight, looking **Bo** in the eye.) I r-r-ran all this way, I was expecting a m-m-mountain.

Bo: It is. Don't be mad. We'll see clear to Boston up here. (She runs to the church, pushing the door open, walking inside.) It's always open for people to come pray.

(**Cornelia** and **Bo** look around, kind of mesmerized by the sanctuary with stain glass windows, and a statue of Mary, crowned in roses. They walk over to the ladder.)

Bo: There's not much to hold on to up there. (She begins to climb the ladder.) Watch out for the nails. And whatever you do, don't touch that rope. (A thick rope hangs through a hole and ends in a coil on the floor.) It rings the bell.

(They slowly climb the ladder. **Cornelia** is clearly unsure about this.)

Bo: You got to keep moving, else you get scared. That's the trick of the whole thing. (There are creaking sounds when the steeple sways.) If you pull that rope, we go deaf. (She yells down to **Cornelia**.)

(Finally they sit at the top, their legs dangling. When the tower sways, **Cornelia** grabs tighter to the beam in front of them.)

Bo: Isn't this the greatest place you've ever been? (**Cornelia** sits as still as stone, not responding.) I watched a guy come fix the bell one day. I watched him climb up. Now I come a lot. (She laughs.) What's your name anyway? You never told me. (**Cornelia** pretends not to hear.) Do you have a name? Of course you do. Everyone has a name. Even the bell has a name. I call him Big Ben. What's yours?

Cornelia: Uh-uh-uh...(She taps her leg, concentrating on her taps instead of what she's going to say.) C-c-c-c-Cornelia.

Bo: Nice name. (She looks straight at **Cornelia**.) How come you talk funny sometimes? (**Cornelia** shrugs.) I mean, it doesn't sound bad or nothing, just different. Slower or something. I don't mind, though.

Cornelia: No?

Bo: No. Everyone's got something. My pa's got a rotten temper. Me, I can't read too good.

Cornelia: Why not?

Bo: I don't know. I just don't get it. The letters get all mixed up. There's a summer class at the school, but it costs twenty-five dollars and my pa says he's not paying nothing extra to the school. (She pauses.) How long is the Crow Lady gonna watch you?

Cornelia: (She shrugs.) Until my m-m-m-mother comes back. Why do they call her the C-crow Lady?

Bo: My ma told me that people say that when she was a little girl, they all got so hungry in that house they ate crows. People get wind of something like that, they never let it go, I guess.

Cornelia: (She shrugs.) Yeah, she is k-k-kind of a crazy lady. I g-g-guess the k-k-kids in town should probably hold their breath when they walk p-p-past the house. Wh-why do they do that anyway?

Bo: It's silly. It's like not stepping on a crack, something like that. It's really dumb 'cause she's nice to me. And to my ma and the rest of us.

Cornelia: I've n-n-n-never seen her do anything but w-w-work in the garden. Or chop trees. What's she d-doing with those trees, anyway?

Bo: I promised I wouldn't tell. (She giggles, then freezes.)

(Bo freezes. Lights dim. Spotlight on Cornelia.)

Cornelia: (She breathes deeply and looks over at **Bo**.) I think that maybe for the first time my speech might not be so terrible, that my throat may not be so wounded after all, and that I may not be alone.

Audition Script - Pete, Bo, Cornelia

Pete: Bo!

Bo: (She looks up, startled.) Pa!

Pete: I never said you could come here. (He rushes over to **Bo**.) You expect us to do all your work?

(**Cornelia** is standing quietly in shadows. She takes a step forward, and **Pete** jumps.)

Pete: Who the heck are you? (**Cornelia** recognizes him as the man from the bank.)

Bo: We were just catching frogs, Pa. That's all. I finished all my chores before I came. (**Pete** doesn't take his eyes off **Cornelia**.)

Pete: Who's this?

Cornelia: (She takes a deep breath.) C-c-c-c-...(**Pete** reaches for **Bo** but misses, so he moves closer, staring at **Cornelia**.)

Pete: Who are you?

Cornelia: Cor-cor-cor...(She stops and starts again.) C-c-c-cornelia. (**Pete** finally recognizes her from the bank and looks away.)

Pete: (Speaks half under his breath.) Dimwit. (He grabs **Bo** and takes her to the car - off stage right.)

Audition Script -Lenore, Agatha, Cornelia

Lenore: Hi, Corns.

Cornelia: (Her heart leaps.) What are you d-d-d-doing here? (She steps toward her mother.)

Lenore: Seeing you, you goose. (She laughs nervously while **Agatha** walks up behind **Cornelia**.)

Agatha: Where's the ride? (She looks to stage left.)

Lenore: At the store to get some things.

Cornelia: (She whispers.) I knew you'd come back. (She steps closer.)

Lenore: (She looks at her feet but then steps forward and hugs **Cornelia** the way a little boy hugs his mother when his friends are watching.) I missed you real bad, Corns. (She looks up quickly, then hesitates.) We're going to Atlantic City, Corns. I'll come get you soon as I can. (She keeps glancing back for the boyfriend's car, eventually lights a cigarette.)

Cornelia: (She straightens her spine and hardens as anger rises from deep inside, her teeth clamping down.)

Lenore: We won't be there long before we come get you. Just long enough to get settled and get jobs and stuff. (**Agatha** touches **Cornelia's** shoulder while **Lenore** looks to the road and smokes in short quick drags.) Maybe things will finally start working out for us. You can go to school down there, Corns. (She stumbles along.) I'll be back for you. You can count the days on your fingers. It will work out, Corns. You'll see. (**Cornelia** looks away as tears fall.)

Cornelia: (She looks at **Agatha**, then back to her **mother**, and says in a strong voice.) I'll be okay here. (Her **mother** looks away, but **Cornelia** goes to her and gives her a hug.)

Audition Script -Principal, Mrs. Paul, Mr. Browne, Cornelia

Principal: Mrs. Paul says you refuse to read in her class. (**Cornelia** nods.) Is it because of your stuttering? (**Cornelia** shrugs.) We have a speech therapist who comes once a week from Dover. We would like her to evaluate you. (**Cornelia** nods.) Very well. Any questions? (**Cornelia** shakes her head.)

Cornelia: (After an awkward moment, she pulls out a reading list and hands it to the **principal**.) I have read *W-w-wuthering H-h-h-heights* and you have me reading *Tom Sawyer* for b-b-b-babies. I should be in the honors cl-cl-class.

Principal: (Looks away.) Well, lots of kids think they should be in the honors class. (Looks around and twists his/her ring.) Let's see how you do in Mrs. Paul's room for a while and then we'll move you up if you can do the work.

Cornelia: N-n-n-no.

Mrs. Paul: Hush now.

Cornelia: I have r-r-r-read these b-b-b-books. (She points to the list. The principal reads them all.)

Principal: But you have no transcript. Has it arrived? (looks at **Mrs. Paul** who shakes her head.) This is quite a list. How do I know you've really read them?

Cornelia: Q-q-quiz me.

Principal: Okay. *Wuthering Heights*. Main character?

Cornelia: H-h-h-heathcliff and Catherine.

Principal: Conflict?

Cornelia: Heathcliff l-l-loves Catherine, but she m-m-m-marries someone else.

Principal: Time period?

Cornelia: Early eighteen hundreds.

Principal: (Turns to **Mrs. Paul**.) Is she right?

Mrs. Paul: (She shrugs.) I think so. It's been a long time.

Principal: (To **secretary**) Call Mr. Browne down here. (**Secretary** nods and picks up the phone.)

Mr. Browne: (He walks in from stage right.) Well, hello. What's up?

Principal: This is Cornelia Thornhill and she thinks she should be in your honors English class. She has read all of these books and answered all my questions about *Wuthering Heights*. What do you think? (He shows him the reading list.)

Mr. Browne: (He reads the list.) Yes, quite challenging, wouldn't you say? Hello, Ms. Thornhill. Hm...*To Kill a Mockingbird*?

Cornelia: Scout and her brother, J-j-jem, are the m-m-m-main characters, and their father, Atticus Finch, is important, too.

Mr. Browne: Conflict?

Cornelia: Whether p-p-people are good or evil underneath it all. (She glares at **Mrs. Paul**.) Also, it's about what happens when pr-pr-prejudice goes wild.

Mr. Browne: She's right. Have you read all these books?

Cornelia: Yes.

Principal: Very well and good. But we don't have any transcript. (He calls to the **secretary**.) Have you called down there yet? (**Secretary** picks up the phone.)

Cornelia: (She presses her foot into the floor and looks straight at the principal.) I'm n-not going back to that class.

Mr. Browne: (After a few awkward seconds.) Why don't we try her in my class and see how she does?

(Everyone freezes. Lights dim. Spotlight on Cornelia.)

Cornelia: (She faces audience.) I bloom a little more from the spot deep inside myself. I am a chrysanthemum, a late bloomer, a fall bloomer, a bloomer nonetheless. (She smiles wide.)