



Sample Pages from Something to Keep us Warm

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SOMETHING TO KEEP US WARM

A ONE-ACT PLAY BY
Stephen Gregg



Something to Keep Us Warm
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Characters

- Norma Tuffler:** Early 40s. Though it's never explicit, Norma's dying of a brain tumor.
- Gabriel Tuffler:** Early 40s.
- Mince Tuffler:** 16. A tad on the quiet side
- Elodie Tuffler:** 14. Always assertive. At the moment, aggressive.
- Five Ghosts:** All different from one another.
- Trick or Treaters:** Offstage voices. One of whom, late in the play, is an adult.

Time

It's Halloween night

Setting

Albuquerque, New Mexico

On the Nature of Ghosts

Here's what you need to know about the ghosts in this play.

Ghosts glide. And gliding is theatrical. When we see a character glide onto the stage, not only do we instantly know that the character is not human; we know it in a way that's both spooky and funny. Gliding is riveting. Any time a ghost is onstage, it will be a lot of what an audience is paying attention to.

In this world, the world of *Something to Keep Us Warm*, ghosts are a signal that death approaches. Norma sees the ghosts a couple of times in the course of the play, and they scare her. Seeing one's imminent demise is not anyone's idea of their best day.

The other thing about ghosts—there are five of them in this play—is that, when one sees them, one has some idea of what they looked like in life. They're different shapes and sizes, or colors. There's often a tell: one wears glasses, or carries a stuffed bear. You get the idea.

Original Production

Something to Keep Us Warm was first presented by the Grosse Pointe South High School Pointe Players on November 15, 2018 with the following cast:

Norma: Allison Frazer

Gabriel: Grayson Kennedy

Mince: Gabriela Moncivais

Elodie: Sofia Minadeo

Student Director: Elyse Tazzia

Director/Producer: Meaghan K. Dunham

Parent Producer: Laura Sanom-Fleming

Technical Director: PJ Veltri

Stage Manager: Sam Herman

Assistant Stage Manager: Awmeo Azad

Original Music: Abe Neds-Fox

Lighting Design: Joel Campion

Photography: Amelia Turco

Sound: Katie Cherven, Josie Monaham

Prop Mistress: Samantha McLeod

Set Crew: Alexa Collins, Danielle Compton, Alex Curran,
Annick DuChateau, Anna Haran

Runners: Teli Hilenzaris, Audrey Monarrez

Make-up: Gigi Niforos

Costume Coordinators: Sam Savage, Carolyn Shrader

Parents Extraordinaire: Gay Dingeman, Susie Frazer, Maria Riccobono,
Lisa Tazzia-Loosevelt

Thank you, per usual, to the writers and actors of Lab Twenty6.
I love the feedback, and I need the deadlines.

The living room of the Tuffler house. The Tuffler family consists of NORMA and GABRIEL and their two teenaged daughters: MINCE, 16, and ELODIE, 14. What gives us a sense of the room are seven objects: a standing lamp, a radio, a coat rack, a small bookshelf that holds a collection of some sort, NORMA's chair, a basket at her feet that contains the tablecloth that she's working on, and a dining table for four. It's cold out, and the coat rack holds scarves and heavy coats.

Stage right leads to the front door. Stage left leads to the back of the house and the bedrooms.

At rise, NORMA sits in the chair, working on a tablecloth that drapes from her lap into the basket. NORMA has lost her hair to radiation, and a cap of some sort keeps her head warm.

Music plays from the radio: something lovely and wistful. She sews for a long moment. There's an urgency to NORMA's sewing. She's desperate to finish the tablecloth that she's working on.

MINCE: (entering, a touch of urgent) Have you seen my mask?

NORMA: Did you check behind your bed?

MINCE: Yes.

MINCE starts to head out.

NORMA: Is that your costume?

MINCE: Yes.

NORMA: It looks like it came from a drug store.

MINCE: It did.

NORMA: You should have had me help you.

MINCE: (a touch of frustration) You were going to help me.

NORMA: Why didn't I?

MINCE: (re: her ferocious sewing) You got busy with that. Speaking of which, I've been meaning to ask you something.

The DOORBELL rings.

ELODIE: (off, assertive) I've got it!

ELODIE passes through the room to the front door. She wears a badly made homemade Halloween costume. We can probably tell that the costume represents a dog but we don't get what's going on with the mouth. Cotton balls are attached below her chin.

MINCE: I've been meaning to ask you something important. A girl in my class got killed in a mountain climbing accident.

NORMA: Oh dear.

TRICK OR TREATERS: *(off)* Trick or Treat!

MINCE: We're going to make a banner that says "We miss you, Channing" and hang it in the gym.

NORMA: What a nice idea.

TRICK OR TREATERS: *(off)* What are you doing?

ELODIE: *(off)* If you don't like it, go away!

A door slam.

MINCE: The thing is, I volunteered you to make the banner.

NORMA: I will!

MINCE: Thank you. It's due Sunday.

NORMA: Whoa! I'd better get started then.

MINCE: Great!

NORMA: Just a few more stitches on this.

MINCE: The banner's super important.

NORMA: I'll work faster.

ELODIE passes back through the room.

NORMA: Elodie, could you get a glass of water for your dying mother?

ELODIE: I'm not headed to the kitchen.

And ELODIE's gone to the back of the house.

MINCE: I'll get it.

NORMA: I'm not thirsty. I just like to hear her snarl. What's she giving away?

MINCE: Those orange and black peanut things that nobody eats.

NORMA: Oh I love those. *(beat)* Maybe a little water.

MINCE: Be right back.

MINCE exits to the back of the house as the doorbell rings.

ELODIE: Got it!

As ELODIE passes to the door.

NORMA: Elodie, why are you mad at me?

TRICK OR TREATERS: *(off)* Trick or Treat! *(beat)* Stop! Why are you doing this?

Door slam. ELODIE storms through.

NORMA: Talk to me!

But she's gone. And now, NORMA sees something out the window downstage. She gets up to get a closer look and we see how unsteady she is. She might use a cane. As she approaches the window, she can't believe what she's seeing. It terrifies her.

NORMA: *(to whatever's outside)* GO AWAY! GET OUT OF HERE. *(to the bedrooms)* Mince! MINCE!

MINCE rushes in with the water.

MINCE: What's the matter?

NORMA: There are ghosts outside!

MINCE: No there aren't.

NORMA: They're right out there!

MINCE: They're just Trick or Treaters.

NORMA: If they're Trick or Treaters, why are they all ghosts?

MINCE: They're not.

NORMA: Where are all the turkeys? Why didn't I see a single pilgrim?

MINCE goes to the window.

MINCE: I see a ballerina, a witch and two Harry Potters. No ghosts. Let's get you back to your chair.

MINCE helps her mother back to her chair.

NORMA: I saw ghosts. And they were here to...

MINCE: (*gentle concern*) Here to what?

NORMA: It sounds ridiculous. They were to somehow... (*some gesture that means "usher away" or "carry me off," but which MINCE can't understand*)

MINCE: I don't know what you're doing.

NORMA: Here to carry me off... or take me or... bye bye, Norma.

MINCE: (*sympathy*) They were just Trick or Treaters.

NORMA: I still think it's a strange thing. Trick or Treaters on Thanksgiving.

MINCE: It's not Thanksgiving. It's Halloween.

NORMA: (*didn't register*) It's different from my day. In my day it was just a meal with your family. Nobody wore costumes. Nobody rang your doorbell.

A GHOST enters: a Halloween ghost, not a Hamlet ghost. During the following, the GHOST picks up the radio and leaves with it. The music disappears as well. None of the characters see the GHOSTS, or notice when objects disappear.

NORMA: Is that your costume?

MINCE: We discussed this already.

NORMA: You might as well not even wear a costume.

MINCE: I'm going to a costume party.

NORMA: You're going to the party?!

MINCE: Yeah, right after dinner.

NORMA: Wonderful! How did you convince your father?

MINCE: I didn't yet.

NORMA: He'll just say "no" again.

MINCE: I'm gonna convince him.

NORMA: How?

MINCE: I'll figure it out.

NORMA: Will the party have... what's the word...

DING DONG! ELODIE passes through.

NORMA: Will there be...

MINCE: Alcohol.

NORMA: No. (*re: alcohol*) Will there be?

MINCE: No.

TRICK OR TREATERS: (*off*) Trick or Treat!

NORMA: But at the party, will there be... why can't I think of this word? It's a type of person.

MINCE: Parents.

NORMA: No. What's the word... a person you want to kiss?

MINCE: I don't think there is a word for that.

NORMA: Answer the question.

MINCE: Yes.

NORMA: How old are you?

MINCE: 16.

NORMA: (*puzzling it out*) 16. I'm trying to think if 16 is... Is that...?

MINCE: Old enough. You're allowed to kiss at 16 in most households. Most households we know, it's considered an OK age to kiss, as long as your parents don't find out.

NORMA: No that's not what I meant. Is 16 older than 12?

MINCE: Yes. A good bit.

NORMA: Go to the party but no kissing.

We hear the garage door opening.

NORMA: Your dad's home. What are you going to say to him?

MINCE: I don't know.

NORMA: Role play. I'm your father. Go.

MINCE: So, I was thinking—

NORMA: No. Don't mention it. Say it.

MINCE: I'm going to go to that party tonight.

NORMA: (as GABRIEL) "No."

MINCE: Please.

NORMA: Terrible. Try again.

The doorbell rings.

ELODIE: I'VE GOT IT!

She passes through to the front door.

NORMA: "You can't go to the party."

MINCE: I'm going to.

NORMA: No, snarl it!

We hear the garage door closing.

MINCE: I'm going!

NORMA: "I'll take away the car for a month."

MINCE: I'll get rides with my friends.

NORMA: (MINCE is hopeless.) When it's time to go, just put on your coat, pull up the hood and leave.

Children screaming and sobbing are heard offstage.

NORMA: Do you remember why she's mad at me?

MINCE: The costume.

NORMA: No, it was bigger than that.

GABRIEL: (off) Hello!

NORMA: Hello hello!!!

GABRIEL enters. He's wearing work clothes but his face is painted in Day of the Dead makeup, and he carries a ceramic elf. (NORMA's collection need not be of elves, but it does need to be of something that makes us feel warmly towards her.)

GABRIEL: It is coooold out. Oh my heavens. (he loads up the coat rack with the things that keep him warm) I saw kids leaving our house and it looked like they were crying.

NORMA: That's Elodie. She's taking this Thanksgiving Trick or Treating pretty seriously.

GABRIEL: This...

MINCE: ("Play along") Thanksgiving Trick or Treating.

GABRIEL: Oh! I can see that. I brought you something.

NORMA: What did you bring me?

GABRIEL: An elf! I saw it in a store window and I thought "that's perfect for your collection."

NORMA: Oh she's beautiful! Thank you so much! (*disapproval*) Is that your costume?

GABRIEL: Yeah.

NORMA: You should have let me help you.

GABRIEL: You did the face! And the people at work loved it.

NORMA: Oh good!

GABRIEL: There was one guy who was like, "I don't know if Day of the Dead makeup is appropriate for an air traffic controller." But they didn't make me take it off.

NORMA: Better to ask for forgiveness than for permission, isn't it Mince?

The doorbell rings. ELODIE tromps through.

GABRIEL: Hello Elodie.

NORMA: She's not really talking to people.

A GHOST enters...

GABRIEL: We have a problem at work. There's too much sun coming through the windows, and they said they'll pay five thousand dollars if anyone could make custom curtains.

NORMA: Five thousand dollars!

GABRIEL: We could get the roof fixed, finally. Maybe have enough left for a new water heater.

NORMA: I'll do it! Curtains for that sterile looking airport.

The GHOST takes away the lamp, and any light it might have been providing.

NORMA: (re: the tablecloth) Right after I finish this.

GABRIEL: The thing is, they need them right away.

NORMA: And we need this right away. It's something to keep us warm.

GABRIEL: I thought it was a tablecloth.

NORMA: No. No no no. It's so much better.

A commotion offstage.

CHILD'S VOICE: (off) You can't do that!

ELODIE: (off) I just did!

ELODIE enters.

GABRIEL: Elodie, are you being mean to the Trick or Treaters?

ELODIE: No, I don't know what's going on with them.

ELODIE exits to the back of the house.

GABRIEL: I'm gonna go change.

NORMA: Wait. Mince. Was there anything you wanted to say to your father?

MINCE: Yes.

NORMA: Go ahead.

MINCE: I want to go to the party.

NORMA: No. Try again.

MINCE: I'm going to the party.

GABRIEL: No you're not.

MINCE: Yeah I am. Right after dinner.

GABRIEL: I told the McPherson's you'd babysit for Ella.

This throws MINCE.

MINCE: No you didn't.

GABRIEL: Yes I did.

MINCE: For tonight?

GABRIEL: Yes. So that's settled.

MINCE: You said I'd babysit.

GABRIEL: You babysit for them all the time.

MINCE: Yeah. They ask me and I say yes.

GABRIEL: This was a special request. They're desperate.

MINCE: I'm sorry. I can't.

A GHOST enters.

GABRIEL: All right. If it means that much to you, then you go to the party. I'll babysit myself.

MINCE: You're not gonna babysit.

GABRIEL: If need be.

MINCE: They'll find another sitter.

GABRIEL: They can't. It's completely fine.

MINCE: OK. I'll go to the McPhersons.

GABRIEL: No I could use the ten dollars an hour.

MINCE: I'll babysit!

GABRIEL: No, you're going to that party!

MINCE: I'm gonna babysit!

GABRIEL: Great! Thank you, sweetheart.

The GHOST whisks away the coat rack and all its clothing.

GABRIEL: I'm going to get changed.

GABRIEL starts to leave.

NORMA: Stop! That was not acceptable! You have got to do better!

GABRIEL: I'm sorry.

NORMA: Not you. *(to MINCE)* Mince, you have got to do better. You're twelve years old! Disobey. *(to GABRIEL)* You. Go change.

DING DONG! ELODIE passes through.

GABRIEL: I will. But... the thing about those curtains is... There's that new tall building near the airport. When the sun reflects off that

building it goes right into the eyes of the air traffic controllers, and it blinds us. We can't see the radar, we can't see the planes.

NORMA: Oh no!

ELODIE: (*off*) You're welcome!

GABRIEL: Those curtains are an emergency, Norma.

NORMA: I'll make them! (*chipper*) Soon soon soon!

ELODIE comes back through.

NORMA: Elodie, wait here for a minute.

ELODIE: No.

GABRIEL: Your mother asked you to stay, so you're going to stay.

NORMA: It's time for a surprise. I know you've all been wondering why I'm working on this, and I can tell you now. It's an invention. This isn't a tablecloth. It's a tablesweat. Part tablecloth, part sweater. It keeps you warm and it keeps your table clean. "Oh no! The heat is out and we're shivering so much that we're spilling things all over the table. Problem solved: we have a tablesweat."

MINCE: Wow.

GABRIEL: That's fantastic!

ELODIE: You have got to be kidding.

GABRIEL's look to ELODIE: "Behave."

GABRIEL: Everybody's gonna want one.

NORMA: I know! I need to have it on the market by Christmas. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I'm not going to make it to Christmas. But look! I've already lasted longer than they said. The doctor said if you're lucky you'll make it to Thanksgiving, and I guess that just proves I'm a very lucky person. (*beat*) This could be my legacy. People will tell the story of how I invented it right before the end. Right before I went I made my mark on the world.

MINCE: Mom, we're your mark on the world. Me and Elodie.

NORMA: You are going to do wonderful things in the world, but you're not what I'll be remembered for. No. It's the tablesweat.

GABRIEL: I'll be right down.

He exits. A GHOST enters and heads straight for the collection of elves. ELODIE starts to leave.

NORMA: Elodie, tell me why you're mad at me.

ELODIE: You know why.

The GHOST takes away the elves, putting them one by one into some sort of carrier—a plastic pumpkin perhaps—brought for this purpose. Or maybe another GHOST helps carry away the whole shelf.

But she's gone.

NORMA: Why is the oldest child always difficult?

MINCE: I'm the oldest child.

NORMA: You are? How old are you?

MINCE: 16. Elodie's 14.

NORMA: That's right. The second child is difficult. The first one is the overachiever. I'm so proud of what a good student you are.

MINCE: That's Elodie.

NORMA: Of course it is. You're the athlete.

MINCE: No that's Elodie.

NORMA: So... Elodie's a better student and a better athlete and she's younger?

MINCE: Yeah.

NORMA: That must be stressful.

MINCE: Sometimes.

NORMA: But you're good at so many things. Like... oh there's just so many.

The inability to think of her daughter's merits sincerely upsets her.

NORMA: I can't pick just one. They're crowding each other out in my head. You're good at... *(but she can't think of one)*. You're so good at, you're *great* at—

MINCE: I'm really good at languages.

NORMA: That's right! Spanish.

MINCE: And French.

NORMA: That's so useful. If a family from Paris were vacationing in Albuquerque and they got lost in the North Valley and broke down, then you could help them find a mechanic. (*somehow this becomes a present problem*) And if they don't have enough money for a hotel just tell them, in their native tongue, to come here. You and Elodie can bunk up and the parents will take Elodie's room. The kids can sleep in here! The sleeping bags are in the garage behind my open house signs.

Ding dong!

NORMA: I wish I spoke French!

ELODIE comes through.

NORMA: Hey you!

ELODIE: What?

NORMA: What is your costume supposed to be?

ELODIE: A dog with rabies. (*re: the cotton*) I'm frothing at the mouth.

NORMA: A for concept. C minus for execution. You should have had me help you.

ELODIE: I asked you to help me.

This was probably too sharp. It might puncture NORMA, but then her natural cheer wins out.

DING DONG!

NORMA: We can fix it now. We'll fix those ears, and—turn around—we'll snip the tail. Rabid dogs have shorter tails. Also, you need a twinkle. I'll make a twinkle for your eye so that the kids at the door know that even though the dog is scary, everything is going to be OK.

ELODIE: That sounds great.

Impatient DING DONGS. A long moment. NORMA has gone blank.

NORMA: What were we talking about?

ELODIE: My costume.

NORMA: It's good. (*a guess*) Don't tell me. It's a dog with rabies. Am I right? You're frothing!

ELODIE: I just told you that!

NORMA: Why are you mad at me?

ELODIE: You know why.

NORMA: I don't.

ELODIE: Yes you do.

NORMA: I never pretend *not* to know things. Quite the opposite, I assure you.

ELODIE: You've been working on that for months.

NORMA: No.

ELODIE: Since July.

This hits NORMA. She has vague memories of that time.

NORMA: July? Four months?

ELODIE: Three months! It's not Thanksgiving. It's only Halloween!

NORMA: No.

ELODIE: Yes! It's crazy because you've gone crazy!

NORMA: Oh!

A GHOST or two enters. They take away the chair that NORMA sits on. She doesn't notice, merely stands for the rest of the play. The stage is bare except for the table, the basket at her feet, the tablecloth that rises from it to her hands.

MINCE: (to ELODIE, furious) Go away.

ELODIE knows she's gone too far.

MINCE: Get the door.

ELODIE: All I meant was—

MINCE: Go fix your froth.

ELODIE exits to the back of the house.

NORMA: I know there's a reason she's mad at me but... what is it? Tell me.

MINCE: She didn't want you to stop treatment.

NORMA: That seems sensible. Why did I stop treatment?

MINCE: You wanted to be here.

NORMA: I am here. So it worked.... It's Halloween?

MINCE: Uh-huh.

NORMA: Every once in a while I see it, above the waterline; I'm not who I used to be. I get these moments of clarity. (*they're terrible*) I hope you never have any.

This upsets her more and more: sadness but also anxiety.

NORMA: I have so much that I haven't finished. This. You.

MINCE: (*possibly a bit abrupt*) What is this?

DING DONG! ELODIE passes through.

NORMA: The tablecloth.

MINCE: But this part.

NORMA: It's pretty, isn't it? I found it in the hall closet. This was the tablecloth we were using when you were about six. I can tell by the grape juice stains. (*beat*) This was from the house on Fairview. It's ugly and I liked it.

ELODIE: (*off*) SO CALL THE POLICE! WE DON'T CARE!

NORMA: See what your sister's up to.

MINCE exits to the door.

ADULT VOICE: WHERE ARE YOUR PARENTS?

ELODIE: THEY'RE NOT HERE!

ADULT VOICE: WHO'S IN CHARGE?

ELODIE: I AM!

ADULT VOICE: THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY!

Door slam. GABRIEL enters, in more casual clothes.

GABRIEL: What's going on?

NORMA: I'm not sure.



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