

GARY: Please. Just ask yourself . . . When your artwork is being rejected by some snooty gallery in L.A. and the traffic drove you crazy on the way home and your manager at your day job made a pass at you again, who will you turn to? Who will be your shoulder? And when things are going well, your first big show is a hit with the critics, who will you share it with? Who will you celebrate and laugh with about the pretentiousness of it all? And who will you go home to? Who do you want that to be?
(*She looks as though she's going to speak, but can't.*)

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Georgie, 20s, was born and raised in a small town in Maine. Neither of her parents were happy when she went away to New York to study art and photography at N.Y.U. Her father, mid 50s, a former alcoholic, took it as a direct assault on his lifestyle. He always enjoyed small-town living. As a family portrait photographer, Edison made a decent living taking pictures of the nice folks in the surrounding communities. He would have made an even better living if he hadn't had a habit of hitting the bottle. In the last few years, listening to the demands of his wife, Maggie, and daughter, he has managed to clean up his act. His wife's condition was a great influence on his sobering up. Two years ago, she started to have headaches. Soon after, Maggie began to forget things—strange things. She was too young for senility, but her confusion only worsened. After a series of tests, the doctors concluded that it was a brain tumor. The family was devastated, but Dr. Wu said it would probably disappear if they used both medication and radiation. In the last week, Georgie has received several calls from her parents' neighbor, Frieda, who is concerned about her mother's welfare. Apparently, her mother and father are acting strangely. Georgie has just driven in from New York to find out what's really happening.

EDISON: Snapshot? What are you doing here? Why didn't you call?

GEORGIE: I did. I tried, Dad. Last night. And no one answered this morning either.

EDISON: I didn't hear it.

GEORGIE: (*She gives him a look.*) So how ya doin', Dad? (*She goes to hug him.*) How's Pops?

EDISON: (*Suspicious.*) Fine. Did you bring the tapes you stole from me?

GEORGIE: I brought home Nat King Cole and your favorites. So where's Mom?

EDISON: She's lying down.

GEORGIE: Is she okay?

EDISON: Why wouldn't she be?

GEORGIE: Well, she's got this little thing called a brain tumor, Dad.

EDISON: And I have a bum knee. Life goes on.

GEORGIE: Well, there is a subtle difference. (*Reaching up.*) Don't I get a hug?

EDISON: Sure. (*He hugs her.*) It's nice to see you, kid.

GEORGIE: Is it really? You seem to be acting kinda weird about me coming home.

EDISON: Not weird. I'm suspicious. You run outta money or what?

GEORGIE: Money? (*Looking around.*) From the looks of the photo studio, I should be asking *you* that.

EDISON: I know it's a little ragged. We've been real beat. No time to clean up. I had a big family come for a sitting a few days ago. Real nice family, but I haven't cleaned yet. I have a baby—this fat baby for her first birthday coming tomorrow. So I'm stayin' real busy. (*Beat.*) So what's up? Why are you here, Snapshot?

GEORGIE: (*Unzipping her bag, pulling out a few tapes.*) Well . . . Frieda called me, Dad. She said things seemed a little off here.

EDISON: Off?

GEORGIE: She said Mom went out in the middle of the night with no shoes on. She was lost.

EDISON: Oh, for cryin' out—is that all? She wasn't lost, and she had her slippers on. She was just real tired.

GEORGIE: Frieda was afraid things were getting to be too much for you. I think she was afraid that you—

EDISON: I know. Hit the bottle again. Well, I didn't. You know

what Frieda's problem is? She watches too many soaps—a little too much "As the World Screws with Your Head." There're no problems here. You can leave Sunday and get back to your precious New "Yuck." (*Looking down at the tapes.*) So where's Judy?

GEORGIE: What?

EDISON: Lose your hearing in that screamin' town? Where's Judy? You tell me you brought back my favorites but I don't see her. It's the least you could do since you decide to pop by unexpectedly. Pop by whenever you please. Pop, pop, pop. Hi Pop. How's Pops? What am I supposed to do? Drop everything?

GEORGIE: I'm sorry, Dad. I was just honestly concerned. (*Hands him a tape.*) Here's Judy.

EDISON: Oh. Thanks.

GEORGIE: You look tired.

EDISON: I'm old. It would be a real stunt if I didn't.

GEORGIE: You aren't old. You know what else Frieda said?

EDISON: I don't care what ole slippery lips said. She's an old bag. An old screwball and a nag on top of it.

GEORGIE: She said Mom wasn't recognizing people.

EDISON: She recognizes me just fine. I don't think she wanted to recognize ole slippery lips the other day. And I admit, she was real tired last Saturday . . . she had a bit of trouble getting David's name out, but she knew who he was fine.

GEORGIE: David? She loves David. Jesus, she adores him. So have you brought her to Dr. Wu?

EDISON: Why bother? He's an idiot. They're all idiots. Nothing's helped.

GEORGIE: That's not true. This is what I was afraid of. This is exactly what Frieda said. You're not taking her, are you?

EDISON: I am. I take her.

GEORGIE: It's probably getting bigger, Dad, doing more damage.

EDISON: The treatment isn't helping.

GEORGIE: Well, how do you know?

EDISON: She told me!

GEORGIE: (*Beat.*) She did?

EDISON: Yes.

GEORGIE: She didn't tell me that. But I knew something was wrong when I talked to her on the phone. That's really why I decided to come.

EDISON: You talked to Mom? (*Beat.*) When?

GEORGIE: Last night. She said you were in the shower or something. It was weird, Dad. Hard to understand her. And for a moment I wasn't sure if she knew who I was.

EDISON: So, I don't always recognize your voice right off. Sometimes it's a bad connection.

GEORGIE: It wasn't a bad connection. She could hear me fine.

EDISON: I hate phones. You lose perspective.

GEORGIE: She really sounded low. I wanted to come and see for myself.

EDISON: Okay, she's having a kind of rough time right now. She just needs a little more TLC.

GEORGIE: I understand, but maybe you need some help with that. Maybe you can't do it alone. Maybe you could use a nurse or something.

EDISON: I take care of her fine. Besides, how are we gonna afford a nurse? I guess you're losing track of where you came from, Ms. New York high society.

GEORGIE: Or maybe just a helping set of hands. You don't necessarily have to pay that much. Maybe an older, retired lady.

EDISON: I don't know.

GEORGIE: And you have to get her to the doctor, Dad. I know she may resist it. But do you want things to get worse?

EDISON: Of course not! Do you? I don't see you helping out.

GEORGIE: Well, I should be. That's why I came home. I've been thinking about it. How I should be home. I'm going to take her to the doctor Monday.

EDISON: Monday? Don't you have to be back for school?

GEORGIE: I'll take a few days off. I don't care. I want her to go in.

EDISON: What about what she wants? She can't take the radiation. She's sick of it.

GEORGIE: The radiation keeps the tumor from growing. If it grows, things will just get worse. I know it's hard for you to take her. You've got a business to keep going. I don't think about those things sometimes, but I'm starting to.

EDISON: Who cares about the business? The business is going fine. It's going. I'll take her to the doctor soon. If there were problems, I would have called, Georgie.

GEORGIE: So why did David tell me that your studio has been closed for days at a time?

EDISON: David? When did you talk to David?

GEORGIE: I stopped by his place on the way here.

EDISON: (*With meaning.*) Oh?

GEORGIE: Get it out of your head, Pops. David and I will never be a thing again. He's content to stay here and teach and live in his mother's house, and I'm . . . well, I'm just not content by nature. But we'll always be friends.

EDISON: Whatever. You'd think he'd try harder. You're a tough one.

GEORGIE: Maybe he's tired of tough. Maybe he'd like it a little more easy.

EDISON: You were a great couple.

GEORGIE: Well, God knows I tried.

EDISON: Don't tell me that thing again.

GEORGIE: I begged him on my knees. I asked him a million times to move with me to New York.

EDISON: That was your mistake. You appeared slightly desperate.

GEORGIE: Slightly? Anyway, the point is, he told me he's seen the lights off here during the day a lot. I just don't want to hear that you've gone back to drinking.

EDISON: One day last week when I had to run errands for Mother's medicine. I'm dry, Georgie. That's not what's going on.

GEORGIE: I don't think David would lie to me.

EDISON: And I would?

GEORGIE: It wouldn't be the first time.

EDISON: I'm not lying. You can see her right away if you don't think I'm caring for her right.

GEORGIE: It's not that. I think you're doing great. But why aren't you taking her to Dr. Wu?

EDISON: By the way, I saw some of those photos you plan to exhibit for your showing thing in New York. Frieda showed me that flyer you sent her.

GEORGIE: Why are you avoiding the question?

EDISON: I was going to call you this week about those photos. I've been sick about it ever since you discussed it with Mom this summer. Do you actually plan to use those photographs you took of her when she was just back from the hospital?

GEORGIE: Mom said it would be fine to use them. She didn't think they were bad—

EDISON: Of course she said that. Because she could see how much you wanted to use them. That doesn't mean she liked them and you know it.

GEORGIE: What's wrong with them? She looks vulnerable and sweet. My professors love them.

EDISON: Your professors don't know her. And she doesn't look vulnerable. She looks funny, weird—lost and confused. She looks sick.

GEORGIE: I don't agree at all. She told me they were fine.

EDISON: That's not what she told me. She told me she was embarrassed. You know your mother likes to look nice in pictures. She likes the house to look nice. You chose the ugliest part of the house—the most run-down area of the library. Caught her at the worst moment, Georgiana.

GEORGIE: Somehow we went from the affectionate Snapshot to the uncomfortable Georgiana. I must have took a wrong turn in Albuquerque.

EDISON: You did. Even David, good-looking David, looks half-dead. You try to make us look like white trash for your

own selfish reasons. Pass these photos off in New York as art. Your personal trauma with rural America and the family you can't make sense of. Your personal trauma with your alcoholic father. Your mother's tragic tumor . . . It's all up for grabs. It doesn't matter if you offend one of us. It's art. It's reality. Well, it's not reality. It's your manipulation of reality. The one that makes you look so angst-ridden and downtrodden.

GEORGIE: Are you finished? (*Beat.*) It's funny that you call me manipulative. You're the master. Only you could turn a conversation around like this. I wasn't talking about my art.

EDISON: You call it art. I call half of it pornography. The rest are photos taken at unappealing perspectives, making your subjects look troubled or demented. And the subjects are us. Do you know how insulting it is? I don't understand.

GEORGIE: I don't expect you to. I know we don't agree on art, but right now, I'm talking about my mother's life—her health. Not what *you* want with my work.

EDISON: Do you think she wants to be remembered like that? Does anyone?

GEORGIE: They're the truth. It doesn't have to be pretty to be beautiful.

EDISON: Your mother is full of pride. I won't let you. She had a life—a life to be damn proud of.

GEORGIE: Of course she did—does! You act as if she's dead. Her dignity is clear in the pictures. You can see it on her face. Her mathematics books are in the background—the teachers' editions. I tried to capture her vulnerability caused by this illness. I love that part of her too. Look, photographs are supposed to make you feel something, Dad. Capture an emotion, a mood. If they made you angry, they were effective!

EDISON: Is it more important to be effective or kind to those you love? Art should make beauty where there isn't beauty. You need imagination to see people at their best, Georgie. I thought I gave you that.

GEORGIE: Yeah, you gave me imagination all right. I had to imagine my way out of my room, out of this studio, out of this house, this stupid town . . . I had to because I was so afraid I'd end up a violent drunk like you.

EDISON: Well, I knew I gave you something. *(Beat.)* But don't take out your anger with me on her. She told you you can use them, yes, but she's humiliated. Trust me.

GEORGIE: You made your point. What if I said I wouldn't use the damn photos if you don't want? Will you then tell me why you won't take her to the doctor?

EDISON: You promise you won't put them up for display?

GEORGIE: *(Pause.)* I promise. Now, what's really up, Dad? Come clean.

EDISON: I told her I wouldn't tell you, but you've a right. I took her to some idiot specialists in Augusta in September. Two specialists. They said there's nothing we can do. The tumor's inoperable. Surgery would damage the brain stem.

GEORGIE: I thought Dr. Wu was hopeful? You told me he was optimistic. You made it sound like nothing. That it would be fine.

EDISON: He was optimistic this summer, but now, well . . . he says the only change is that's it's gotten bigger. She doesn't want to live like this, Georgie. She was in pain every day with the radiation. She just asked for a few weeks off. That's all. We're going to go back this week and start up again.

GEORGIE: I know she's in pain, but she has to go every day. It'll cure her.

EDISON: I love her, Georgie. It's been twenty-eight years we've been together. The only thing your mother's ever asked of me in all that time is to stop drinking, make peace with you, and help her through this. This is the help *she* wanted. You don't let someone you love stay in pain even if it means you might risk losing them.

GEORGIE: I don't understand. We can take her to other specialists. Those doctors don't know everything. I don't understand. How could you both keep me in the dark? I never

knew . . . I mean, you both let me think she was getting better.

EDISON: She wanted you to stay at school. She knows how you love it.

GEORGIE: I don't care about school! Screw school! She's my mother. I won't go back now. If I had known . . . I would have come home immediately. Are you saying she's going to . . .

EDISON: I don't know. *(He moves in.)* All I know is that she's in a lot of pain.

GEORGIE: You can't give up, Dad, or she'll see it in your eyes! It's this house, this studio—it is full of death. It always was. With all that drinking and depression. I won't let you feel hopeless. I want to see her. *(Shaking her father violently.)* I won't give up! I won't let her die. I refuse to let her! I want to see her, Dad! You'll kill her!

EDISON: *(Grabs her tightly and hugs her hard.)* It's all right, baby. It's all going to be all right. *(She cries in his arms.)*