

The Jewel in Papas Crown

By: E.P Conkle

Synopsis:

The five daughters of Wardour Grassmere, deceased, have gathered to hear the lawyer read their father's will. Full of greedy anticipation, each is afraid that the others will receive more than their share of his estate, and over in a corner sits a young girl. The sisters stare at her, wondering why she's here. The first bequest is \$500 cash for the girl. Well, that's a paltry sum, the sisters agree—but why would he leave it to her? ... Who is she anyway? As the rest of the will is read, it seems that each daughter has shared equally in their father's considerable wealth. Each expresses her love and joy as fabulous legacies are announced. But then there is an unexpected twist as the lawyer continues with the reading, and not everyone got what they thought they were getting.

Characters:

LAWYER: Female or male; A professional attorney tasked with reading the late Mr. Grassmere's will. Intelligent, patient, and composed, the Lawyer serves as the voice of reason amid the chaos created by the sisters. Though she/he begins as a neutral observer, she gradually reveals a compassionate side, particularly in her/his treatment of Annie. She/he remains calm under pressure and approaches every situation with fairness.

WOMAN A: Female; Mr. Grassmere's eldest daughter. Confident, outspoken, and convinced she deserves the best portion of her father's estate. She is dramatic, impatient, and quick to complain when things do not go her way. Despite claiming to care deeply about family, her true concern lies in what she stands to inherit.

WOMAN B: Female; The second daughter. Proud, status-conscious, and eager to appear successful, Woman B sees herself as sophisticated and important. She becomes especially excited by the possibility of inheriting her father's yacht and is constantly comparing herself to her sisters. Competitive and somewhat vain, she is determined to come out ahead.

WOMAN C: Female; The third daughter. Sharp-tongued, sarcastic, and highly observant, Woman C enjoys pointing out the flaws and misfortunes of others. She believes herself to be the smartest person in the room and is quick to criticize her

sisters. While she can be witty and entertaining, her confidence often borders on arrogance.

WOMAN D: Female; The fourth daughter. Emotional, impulsive, and energetic, Woman D reacts to every development with enthusiasm or outrage. She rarely thinks before she speaks and often allows her feelings to take control. Her larger-than-life reactions make her one of the more animated members of the family.

WOMAN E: Female; The youngest daughter. Woman E often takes charge of the conversation, though she can be easily influenced. While she joins in the family squabbles, she is often a bit slower to understand what is happening around her.

ANNIE X: Female, young, about 11-15; A shy and kind-hearted girl who cared for Mr. Grassmere during the final years of his life. Unlike the sisters, Annie genuinely loved and respected him, expecting nothing in return. Humble, sincere, and grateful, she serves as the emotional heart of the play. Her innocence and goodness stand in sharp contrast to the greed and selfishness surrounding her.

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THE JEWEL IN PAPA'S CROWN

A Play in One Act

By

E. P. CONKLE

Dramatic Publishing Company

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(THE JEWEL IN PAPA'S CROWN)

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Dedication

To Virginia

THE JEWEL IN PAPA'S CROWN

Cast

For 7 women (some roles may be played by men)

Lawyer

Woman A

Woman B

Woman C

Woman D

Woman E

Girl

Δ

Place: A living room

Time: Today or yesterday

ABOUT THE PLAY

E. P. Conkle wrote "The Jewel in Papa's Crown" and several other all-women scripts for his wife, Virginia, when she was directing plays for a women's club, hence the all-female cast.

"He said he dedicated them to me, but he never told me," she commented as this book was being prepared for publication. The manuscripts were stuck in a trunk—literally lost to the world until we urged the venerable playwright to search through his archives for some unpublished works.

E. P. Conkle's name is a distinguished one in the literature of American theatre. Many anthologies include at least one of his plays. He was born in Nebraska, the heart of the nation, and his works portray the heartbeat of America. After receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska, he did graduate work at Yale University and spent a year in Europe as a Guggenheim fellow. He took his Ph. D. degree at the University of Iowa—"the first doctor's degree ever given in the U. S. for playwriting," according to Mrs. Conkle.

Dr. Conkle's *Prologue to Glory*, one of the best of the many plays about Abraham Lincoln, was included in Burns Mantle's volume of the 10 best Broadway plays of 1937-38. His first Broadway production was *200 Were Chosen*. His *No Time For Heaven* was published by I. E. Clark, ■■■, in 1972, and has had innumerable productions throughout the U. S. and Canada.

Like nearly all his plays, "The Jewel in Papa's Crown" is in the Conkle tradition of folk drama. The playwright knows America and Americans well, and he has a genius for digging the humor out of our hearts and the wretchedness out of our souls.

Although "The Jewel in Papa's Crown" was written for his wife's all-woman casts, the Lawyer can obviously be played by a man, and few if any dialogue changes would be needed to change two or three of the sisters into greedy, self-serving brothers.

Playing time is about 30 minutes.

THE JEWEL IN PAPA'S CROWN

[An old-fashioned living room of a house in B City. Highly ornamented with doo-dads and mementoes. A group of five chairs arranged in front of a table. On these chairs sit five middle-aged, over-dressed WOMEN in a fashion of mourning. On a sixth chair at the back sits a young GIRL, perhaps around 12 or 13, alone. Behind the table sits a WOMAN in a suit, and on the table before her is an envelope, unopened. She is adjusting her glasses preparatory to opening the envelope. The FIVE WOMEN sit straight and apart as if they do not like each other, although they are quite obviously sisters. They are waiting as patiently impatient as they can. The WOMAN AT THE DESK looks up after slitting the envelope open with a letter-opener. This woman is a lawyer. The contents of the envelope is a will]

LAWYER. *[Clearing her voice]* A-hem. *[The SISTERS all clear their throats. The little GIRL sits quietly interested]* A-hem. *[Unfolding the document inside the envelope; studying it]* The handwriting . . . is a bit hard to . . . make out.

WOMAN A. Please git on with the reading. *[The other SISTERS nod, restless. They edge forward on their seats]*

OTHER SISTERS. Yes, pl-ease!

LAWYER. I shall get on as fast as I can make things out.

GIRL. I can make Mr. Grassmere's handwriting out very well, ma'am. *[The SISTERS all turn toward the girl. She goes on, explaining shyly]* I've been doing it all my life for Mr. Grassmere.

WOMAN B. *[As all the SISTERS turn back to the Lawyer]* Who is she?

WOMAN C. Nobody knows. She's been living here with Papa.

WOMAN D. Probably the housekeeper's child.

WOMAN E. Please get on with Mr. Grassmere's will!

LAWYER. *[Smiling]* I . . . will. *[The LAWYER readjusts her glasses, then adjusts her mouth, then reads out loud]* "The Last Will and Testament of Wardour Grassmere." *[Reading again to make sure]* Yes. "The Last Will and Testament of Wardour Grassmere."

WOMAN B. We know, we know. You read it once.

WOMAN C. He was our dear Papa.

WOMAN A. We are interested in what he left each of us.

LAWYER. I understand. Let me see . . . ah, yes . . . [*Following the will with her index finger*] "Being of advanced age, but of sound mind, as will be attested to by the signatories of this document . . ." [*The LAWYER starts to turn to the end to see who the witnesses were*]

WOMAN D. Please get on.

WOMAN E. Who cares who they were?

WOMAN C. I'm sure they were sound of mind!

LAWYER. [*After having examined the signatures of the witnesses*] Yes, yes. It was signed before a notary. Benjamin Smithers of B City here . . .

WOMAN A. For the Lord's sake, for the Lord's sake, for the Lord's sake . . . !

WOMAN C. Read the will, won't you?

LAWYER. Coming to it. Ah . . . yes. "Being of advanced age . . ." [*She stops, removes her glasses*] Just how old was Mr. Grassmere when he died?

WOMAN D. [*Practically shouting*] Of advanced age, obviously!

LAWYER. Obviously, probably. "Being of advanced age and of sound mind, as will be attested to by the signatories of this document, and placing my mortal, immortal, and unmortal bodily remains in the hands of my Maker and the earthworms . . ."

GIRL. Poor Mr. Grassmere! So sweet! [*The SISTERS all turn, viciously*]

WOMAN E. Hush!

WOMAN A. [*To Woman E*] Shut up, please!

LAWYER. I will go on when you ladies stop this going-on.

WOMAN B. We were not going-on.

WOMAN C. It was her!

WOMAN D. She!

WOMAN B. It was the girl.

LAWYER. I thought I heard the rest of you, too. Well . . . as I was reading . . . Mr. Grassmere to the worms and, I suppose, his soul to God.

WOMAN E. Amen.

WOMAN C. Now that that's over, let's see what he did about his worldly remainders.

WOMAN B. You mean his household goods, his earthly possessions . . .

WOMAN A. That's just what she meant.

WOMAN C. That's exactly what I meant.

WOMAN B. Being the leading banker of B City I suppose he left us a great deal!

WOMAN D. I suppose he left it evenly divided amongst us, his only living relatives.

WOMAN E. His loved ones, as it were.

WOMAN A. Though I may say none of us has seen Papa in ten years.

WOMAN E. Nine-and-a-half.

WOMAN C. Only eight.

WOMAN B. *[To the Lawyer]* Go on, go on. It makes no difference.

WOMAN D. We are the only ones he could leave his things to.

WOMAN E. His only loved ones. *[They ALL nod. Wait, silently. The LAWYER re-adjusts her glasses and bows her head and index finger to the will]*

LAWYER. "I do hereby bequeath to little Annie X the sum of \$500 . . ."

WOMAN A. Who is "Little Annie X"?

WOMAN B. No one ever heard of her.

GIRL. *[Standing up]* Here I am. I am little Annie X. *[The SISTERS all turn]*

WOMAN C. Well, who is she?

WOMAN E. Someone said she was the former housekeeper's child.

GIRL. I was. I also kept Mr. Grassmere's house for him when my mother died two years ago.

LAWYER. *[Reading]* ". . . I do hereby bequeath to little Annie X the sum of \$500, which is herewith enclosed." *[The LAWYER looks into the envelope and draws out a \$500 bill. The SISTERS all turn up their noses]*

WOMAN E. I doubt if she earned it.

WOMAN C. The little she probably did.

LAWYER. Well, Annie X, come up and get your bequest.

GIRL. *[Flustered, uncertain]* Should . . . I? I . . . don't . . . know!

WOMAN D. Go and get it so we can go on with the bulk of Papa's estate. *[The GIRL slips shyly up to the table]*

GIRL. But . . . what shall I . . . do with it? I've never had so much—

WOMAN B. Oh, pshaw!

GIRL. I've never even *seen* so much!

LAWYER. I'll help you with it.

WOMAN A. Take it, take it, and get back where you belong. And thank Papa for his generosity.

GIRL. [*Taking the bill*] Oh, I will, I will! Thank you!

LAWYER. Don't thank me.

GIRL. I wasn't. I was thanking dear Mr. Grassmere! [*The GIRL slips back to her seat and sits in wonderment, clutching the \$500 bill. The LAWYER starts to read on*]

LAWYER. "To my beloved first daughter I hereby bequeath my home and all its belongings."

WOMAN A. Oh, happy day! [*She stands, crying out*] To me! [*The OTHER SISTERS sit sullen and silent*] I am about to . . . bawl!

WOMAN B. By all means, don't! You may not want to when you hear what we . . . [*nodding to the OTHERS, who nod back*] . . . hear the other bequests.

LAWYER. "To my beloved second daughter I bequeath my yacht . . .

WOMAN B. His . . . yacht?

WOMAN C. I hadn't heard of the yacht for years.

WOMAN E. It was that \$100,000 one he used to roam the seas in with mama.

WOMAN A. I think my property is worth at least \$100,000. So, we are even, thank goodness . . . so far.

WOMAN B. But . . . where is the yacht?

LAWYER. It says here it is in the B City River marina.

WOMAN B. [*Elated, jumping up*] I saw it the other day! It was the huge one with the blue pennons! Riding there so serenely. I'll sell it, for it must be more than \$100,000 now! Glory be, I am better off than you!

WOMAN A. Not after deterioration, dear sister—all the barnacles on her bottom. Almost as many as on yours, probably.

WOMAN B. When I saw her she had not deteriorated and I'm sure I saw no barnacles on her bottom, nor on mine. Oh, glory be to dear old Papa!

LAWYER. If you will hush up I will go on.

WOMAN C. By all means do! I am his third daughter.

LAWYER. "To my third beloved daughter I bequeath my bank ac-

count, including all monies in my checking account, all existing bonds, mortgages, etc."

WOMAN C. That is enough for me! I know Papa was a very rich man and I'm sure there are at least \$100,000 funds in the bank at my personal disposal!

WOMAN E. Yes, I am sure of that. We are all doing very well.

LAWYER. "To my fourth beloved daughter I leave my wife's and my complete solid gold service including all flatware, forks, spoons, teapots, epergnes, plates, and all the rest of the solid gold 542 different pieces."

WOMAN D. [*Leaping up*] Just what I wanted! Gorgeous, gorgeous golden tableware on my linen Irish tablecloth! Oh, joy, oh, joyous joy! [*Then she thinks of something*] But where is it?

WOMAN E. I'm sure it must be here in the house somewhere!

WOMAN B. Probably packed away in the attic.

WOMAN D. Papa would never have used it with . . . [*motions her head toward the girl*] . . . her and her mother around.

LAWYER. "And now, for my fifth beloved daughter, I bequeath my museum of old cars, all 75 of them as they stand in the garage."

WOMAN E. Old cars? [*Indignant*] What can I do with old cars?

WOMAN A. "What can you do with old cars?" You can sell them. You can show them. You can run them up and down the city with everyone looking at you, that's what you can do with them!

WOMAN E. I . . . can? Will . . . they run?

WOMAN B. Papa always kept them in fine shape.

WOMAN E. I'd like that . . . running them around for people to look at me in! I don't really need to sell them although I do suppose they're valuable.

WOMAN A. At least \$100,000 . . . maybe.

WOMAN D. Perhaps a wee bit more, even. [*The SISTERS all turn to look at each other. They ALL give out a happy, relieved sigh*]

SISTERS. [*Ad lib*] Papa did very well by all of us, indeed! [*They start to get ready to leave*]

WOMAN A. Maybe we should see more of each other somewhere sometime.

WOMAN B. It's been seven years since I've seen one of you.

WOMAN C. Of course we all live across town from each other and we're all busy about lots of things.

WOMAN D. It's been such a nice day. I wonder when we can get possession of our possessions.

WOMAN E. Maybe we should ask the lawyer. [*The SISTERS turn to the LAWYER, who has been examining the will more closely*]

WOMAN A. Miss or Mrs. Lawyer . . .

LAWYER. [*A little excited*] Ladies, ladies . . . I did not notice at the bottom of this page Mr. Grassmere has written in bold letters O-V-E-R.

WOMAN C. "Over" what?

LAWYER. It means to turn the page over. This I have done. And there are some more recent codicils here. [*The SISTERS are perturbed*]

WOMAN E. What is a codicil?

LAWYER. An amendment or addition. Pray, sit down.

WOMAN D. Why should we sit down?

LAWYER. I think it best.

WOMAN B. [*Imperiously*] But . . . why, if we prefer to stand?

LAWYER. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] As you will. Codicil 1. "I do herewith bequeath all my clothes and wearing apparel to the Good Will Society. Except the clothes I have on at my burial."

WOMAN C. [*Indignantly turning to go*] This is completely silly! Let's go . . .

LAWYER. Codicil 2. "The yellow yacht of which I spoke in my late will was burned to the waterline later and sank in the B City River after a New Year's party on the night of January 1," [*Give a date several years ago*]

WOMAN B. Wha-at!

WOMAN A. [*Laughing hilariously*] It says your pennoned yacht sunk in the B City River in, dearie!

WOMAN B. Oh, no! My papa did this to me after all I did for him!

WOMAN A. Just what did you ever do for him?

LAWYER. [*Breaking in*] Codicil 3. "All of my property which I once owned . . ."

WOMAN A. He "once owned"?

LAWYER. ". . . is heavily mortgaged and will not be enough to gather a farthing's worth, once the mortgage is settled."

WOMAN A. I might have known! The old skunky skunk!

WOMAN C. [*Laughing hilariously*] You may have to pay a little to get your mortgage settled, sister dear. What a joke on you!

WOMAN A. He was an old skunky skunk if there ever was one! An old pole-cat skunk!

WOMAN C. [*Rather pleased with herself*] Well, dear sisters. I seem to be the one who has come out ahead . . . his checking account, stocks and bonds . . .

LAWYER. I'm sorry.

WOMAN C. What do you mean you're "sorry"?

LAWYER. All of Mr. Grassmere's stocks and bonds were sold fifteen years ago and all we have here of his bank account is an overdrawn statement of \$1.43.

WOMAN C. And I have to pay \$1.43? I'm the worst off of you all! Let me get out of here. I . . .

WOMAN E. [*Angrily*] Well, what of my codicil?

LAWYER. Your cars were all stripped of everything but their axles ten years ago, and even one or two of the axles were taken.

WOMAN E. Then my legacy is a garage full of old car axles?

LAWYER. So it appears.

WOMAN E. I swear I will go down to that undertaking parlor and bend them one-by-one over his dead and gray-haired bald head! [*The SISTERS are all furious, waiting to hear the last codicil*]

LAWYER. Codicil 6. "The solid gold tableware all tarnished and wore down to lead. My wife, your late mother, was very fond of it even that way and asked that all 542 different pieces be buried with her in her coffin; and so it was done. Anyone wanting the lead tableware will have to disinter dear old Mama."

WOMAN D. I ought to do it! I swear I ought to do it! I am so, so mad!

WOMAN E. We are all so, so mad, aren't we?

WOMAN A. What a stinking way to spend a misspent morning! And with you four dear sisters!

WOMAN C. What a horrible, horrible way for a father to treat his own flesh and blood!

WOMAN E. I feel like going up and shoving my lace handkerchief down that miserable lawyer's throat!

WOMAN D. I feel like . . . like . . . [*Her eyes light on the Girl in the back of the room. She points an accusing finger*] She is the only one who got anything! [*The SISTERS all look accusingly at the GIRL. She looks down at the crumpled \$500 bill in her hand. She doesn't know what to say or do*]

GIRL. I don't . . . know what . . .

WOMAN A. We could sue her for it if we wanted to, I guess.

WOMAN D. We could just go back and take it away from her!

WOMAN E. It's really ours! [*The LAWYER comes down to the Girl, puts her arm around her shoulder*]

LAWYER. Keep it, child. It's yours legally. I'm sure you earned it.

WOMAN C. [*With point*] No . . . doubt! [*To the other Sisters*] Let's get out of here!

LAWYER. Just a minute, ladies. You have not decided where your father is to be buried.

SISTERS. [*Never having thought of this*] Bur-ied?

LAWYER. Yes, interred.

WOMAN A. Do we have to pay for that?

GIRL. [*Eagerly*] I'll . . . pay for it! I will. From my money! [*She holds her bill out. The LAWYER puts it back into her hand*]

LAWYER. You will none of you have to pay for anything. Mr. Grassmere has had burial insurance apparently since before he married Mrs. Grassmere. Now . . . where shall we lay him?

WOMAN C. Beside Mama, of course.

GIRL. But . . . but . . . but Mr. Grassmere always said he wanted to be buried . . . beside my mama!

WOMAN D. Your mama?

GIRL. Right over beside my mama. He bought them both a burial lot there! Side-by-side.

WOMAN A. This is the living end! The living end! [*As she turns to the door:*]

WOMAN B. The absolute end!

WOMAN A. Bury him in the potter's field!

WOMAN D. Don't bury him anywhere; just let him lay around!

WOMAN E. "Lie," dear.

WOMAN D. Who, me?

WOMAN E. Let him "lie around."

WOMAN D. Well, that's what I said, "Let him lay around." [*The SISTERS all flounce out*]

LAWYER. [*Musing*] I wonder why he wanted to be buried by your mama, unless . . . [*she stops*] . . . oh, well. We'll just see that that is done. You know, dear . . . [*She picks up a gilt-edged photograph from the table*] . . . you sort of look like Mr. Grassmere.

GIRL. I know I do! And Mama always said I did. Do you . . . [*bravely*] . . . do you suppose I was his little daughter?

LAWYER. [*Taken back a bit*] I . . . don't . . . perhaps . . .

GIRL. But Mr. Grassmere was over 90 when I was born. Would . . . that make any difference?

LAWYER. Not that I . . .

GIRL. Is it . . . possible?

LAWYER. Knowing Mr. Grassmere I should say it is *probable*.

GIRL. He always called me his little Annie X. I wonder why.

LAWYER. Perhaps you were his little unknown quantity.

GIRL. Would it be a wicked thing if I were his little daughter?

LAWYER. By no means! I would say you were the bright jewel in the crown of his old age.

GIRL. [*Pleased, delighted, speechless*] You mean . . . really?

LAWYER. Yes, my dear. [*The LAWYER begins gathering up her papers from the table*]

GIRL. [*Dancing a little dance to herself*] How . . . lovely!

CURTAIN

PRODUCTION NOTES*Properties*

Unopened envelope containing Papa's will and a \$500 bill—on table
Letter opener—on table
Eye glasses—Lawyer

Costumes

The **Sisters** are over-dressed, each trying to outdo the others; however, there is some indication that they are in mourning. The **Lawyer** wears a dark suit. In contrast to dark colors of the other costumes, the little **Girl** should wear something brightly colored—a little jewel.

The Set

"An old-fashioned living room, highly ornamented with doo-dads and mementoes" is the author's description of the set. Essential pieces are five chairs facing a table and chair. Behind the five chairs is another chair, for the little **Girl**. Other furniture may be added as desired.