**Good Things Come**

**By Dave Carley**

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The inspiration for this play came from my mother. She spent a great deal of the 1930s worrying about who exactly might crawl through her bedroom window and carry her off. Like Charles Lindbergh, her father believed in the healthful effects of night air, and required her window to be open - wide enough for an illegal German to slip through and snatch her. Luckily for my mother there was to be no Bruno Hauptmann in her life.

For Mig. You can raise the window now.

**Cast:**

ELLEN: one actress, playing ages 11 through 86. The role could be divided, as well, with the final role played by an older actress.

MAN or MEN: DAD (35 - 55), KURT (18), BRIAN (40), VINCENT (30), FIREMAN (86). Doubling is fine.

**Time:**

1936 to present

**Location and Set:**

ELLEN’s bedroom, somewhere near Hopewell, New Jersey. A bed and a window.

**Synopsis:**

Ellen McWhirter lives in fear of being kidnapped. That is, until she’s old enough to live in fear she won’t be. She spends much of her time lying in bed, with her window open wide – waiting for the perfect gentleman caller. When he doesn’t arrive, she decides to take action, even if it means burning down the house.

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**Spring, 1936**

*Music to establish era. As lights come up, ELLEN becomes visible. She’s sitting up in bed, the covers pulled up around her face. She’s 11.*

**ELLEN:** Betty Gow put the baby to bed exactly at 9. The hall clock was chiming as she pinned the blankets tightly around the child. So he couldn’t thrash when he slept. Betty turned out the lights and left the room. She went to the kitchen where she had a relaxing Ovaltine. It’s not easy minding a baby, especially a really famous one. It was a nasty winter’s night. March 1, 1932 to be precise. Four years ago, almost to the day. I was 7 and the events of that night are etched in my mind. Forever.

Baby’s Daddy was in the library, right beneath the infant’s room. He was writing letters to Important People and signing autographed photos for the Less Important. Baby’s mother was having a bath. Working out the tensions of being famous. Back upstairs in the nursery, the window was open a good foot. Just like my own Daddy, Charles Lindbergh believed in the value of fresh air.

Bang! A ladder hits the window sill!

 *(There’s a bang here of the ladder hitting the sill.)*

Downstairs in his study, Mr. Lindbergh pauses mid-autograph and wonders about the sound. He decides it’s a slat falling off an orange crate in the kitchen. Seriously. A slat off an orange crate? He goes back to his work. Anne Morrow Lindbergh hears nothing over her splashing.

Scrape! The ladder is finding a grip along the sill!

 *(Scraping as the ladder finds a grip.)*

Footsteps up. Stealthy. A shadowy figure appears at the window. A very, very handsome German face becomes visible. Bruno Hauptmann. One foot in, then shoulder in, torso in, other leg, he’s there. Bruno pads silently over to Charles Lindbergh Junior and starts freeing him from his blankets. Tsk-tsking in broken English at the very idea of pinning a child. Bruno picks the sleeping baby up with one felonious arm and slips back over to the window. Leaves a ransom note riddled with spelling mistakes. It’s not his fault; English is not his first language. Bruno and Baby slide out into the winter night. Gone. Down the ladder - and straight into the horrified psyche of a nation.

That was four years ago and I have lived in terror ever since.

 *(Steps up a ladder.)*

My Daddy thinks an open window is a guarantee of health. It must be *wide* open to the elements. All winter. Some mornings I wake up – that’s if I’ve slept – I wake up and there’s a light dusting of snow across my floor. Sometimes there are footprints in the snow. Seriously. And not just the footsteps of The Pest. (That’s my mother.) These are *real* footsteps. Intruder footsteps.

This world is full of Bruno Hauptmanns. It’s really, really scary.

 *(There’s a face at the window. ELLEN gives a happy yelp.)*

**FATHER:** Hi Ellie. It’s that time of year again. Spring has sprung. On go the screens.

**ELLEN:** Ah, springtime. Screens with little hooks locking them to the window-frame. An extra layer of protection. I’m safe until next October. *(Nestles down.)* I can sleep now.

**December, 1941**

*Music to establish era. Lights come up. ELLEN is in bed, more visible. Looking a little impatient, actually. She probably has a Life Magazine, which she flings aside.*

**ELLEN:** Around the time I turned 13, I began changing from a girl to a woman. That was four years ago. The fear *(Indicates window.)* also began to change. An open window isn’t so scary anymore, at least not in a kidnap-and-kill-me kind of way. It’s more tingly-scary. Scary up here. Tingly down there.

Now I look forward to October, when Daddy takes off the screen that separates me from Bruno Hauptmann. My window is once again open to the elements, open to the possibility that someone might slide it up, silently, quietly, slip in like a cat, pad around to my bed. *(Fakes waking.)* Who are you? *(Fakes it again.)* Bruno? Bruno is that you?

 *(There’s a knock on her bedroom door.)*

**FATHER:** *(Remaining outside.)* Ellie dear, are you OK?

**ELLEN:** Yes Daddy.

**FATHER:** Who’re you talking to?

**ELLEN:** Myself again.

**FATHER:** You’ve been in there all evening.

**ELLEN:** I’m studying.

**FATHER:** Well, I just wanted you to know that the President was on the radio just now. We’ve declared war on Germany.

**ELLEN:** *(Pause while ELLEN digests this.)* Thank you Daddy.

**FATHER:** Have a good sleep dear.

**ELLEN:** *(Back to audience.)* Bruno Richard Hauptmann. Address: 1279 East 222nd Street in the Bronx. An illegal German immigrant. Handsome in that illegal German way. Drove a Dodge. When he was arrested, he had marked ransom money on his person. The police investigation was verrrry sloppy but there was just too much circumstantial evidence, even with so many errors. Bruno – poor dishy Bruno - was put in the electric chair and fried. Bzzzzt.

America’s babies were safe again. America’s young girls could sleep again.

But America’s young women. Well. That’s another story, isn’t it. We don’t really want to sleep, do we…

 *(Sound of ladder against the window, and footsteps climbing.)*

But alas, even the best laid plans of a young woman can run into snafus. Like Mr. Roosevelt declaring a war.

 *(KURT appears at the window. He puts a leg in, slips mostly in, then falls in, with a small suitcase hitting the floor with a bang.)*

Shhhhh!

**KURT:** Sorry.

 *(ELLEN motions KURT to silence. Listens. Then:)*

**ELLEN:** It’s OK Daddy! I just dropped a textbook! *(Back to KURT.)* Clumsy Dumkopf. You have to be more careful. He won’t come in but my mother The Pest might. She has ears like Dumbo.

 *(KURT begins to kiss the covers over his beloved ELLEN.)*

Slow down, Kurt. What are you doing. Stop that. A little on the ear. OK, stop. Why’re you stopping. Here. And here. What’s the suitcase for anyway?

**KURT:** *(Surprised.)* Your things. Like you told me.

**ELLEN:** It’s a bit small, don’t you think. What could fit in that?

**KURT:** We can buy stuff later.

**ELLEN:** ‘We can buy stuff’ - with what money, Kurt?

**KURT:** The money I’ve been saving from my job at Western Union and/

**ELLEN:** Western Union. Hmm. You sure you want to give up that job?

**KURT:** For you, I’d give up my life. For mein Ellieka. I would walk across burning coals with people whipping my bare back with willow branches, I would scrape a bouquet of thorns over my tender Teutonic buttocks, I would/

**ELLEN:** *(Shivers with desire before remembering her nation is at war, and pushing back the amorous KURT.)* Sending telegrams puts you in a position of confidentiality. Telegrams arrive. Telegrams go. Some are banal. But some are vital to the national interest. And the link in the chain is you, Kurt. *You*.

**KURT:** I don’t understand.

**ELLEN:** War has been declared.

**KURT:** I know, isn’t it terrible/

**ELLEN:** With Germany.

**KURT:** Ellen?

**ELLEN:** *Your* Germany.

**KURT:** I am American.

**ELLEN:** You talk German.

**KURT:** Only because you like it.

**ELLEN:** I don’t like it anymore.

**KURT:** But just yesterday –

**ELLEN:** Yesterday we weren’t at war. I think you better go.

**KURT:** Baby!?

**ELLEN:** I can’t elope with the enemy. I have to draw the line.

**KURT:** I won’t go! You are talking crazy! I’m American. 100 per cent! I’ll stay here! Ellen, we’re supposed to get married tomorrow – there’s a Justice of the Peace waiting for us in Pennsylvania and/

**ELLEN:** Go.

**KURT:** I won’t leave!

**ELLEN:** I’ll call Daddy. There’s a big sentiment in this country against Germans climbing in bedroom windows. One word to the police from Daddy…

**KURT:** You’re breaking my heart!

**ELLEN:** Go.

 *(KURT goes to the window.)*

**KURT:** If you change your mind…

**ELLEN:** I’ll send you a telegram.

 *(KURT begins to crawl out.)*

Leave the window open.

 *(KURT leaves. ELLEN settles back into her bed, a bit petulantly.)*

Life just got more complicated. *(Arranges blankets.)* Clearly, patience is required. I’m only 17. *(Brightening.)*How long can a bloody war last?

 *(Lights down.)*

**Winter, 1947**

*Music interlude to establish post-War era. Lights come up on Ellen, now 22 and still a bit bored. She’s clearly waiting for someone. Slowly we see someone trying to climb up and get in. ELLEN doesn’t seem to care much; much eye-rolling and impatient tapping of feet etc. And then a man flops in to her bedroom.*

**ELLEN:** She smells a rat, Daddy.

**DADDY:** Damn.

**ELLEN:** She was knocking on my door asking where you were. I tried to tell her you were in the study studying, but she wasn’t buying. The Pest.

**DADDY:** Has she gone to bed?

**ELLEN:** She’s probably waiting downstairs by the front door, with a gun. Let me smell your breath.

**DADDY:** I only drank vodka.

**ELLEN:** Yup. Potato.

**DADDY:** You’re making that up.

**ELLEN:** Daddy. Did you always drink so much?

**DADDY:** Yes. But I used to hide it better. I’d take long drives in the country. Go away on “business trips”.

**ELLEN:** It’s very selfish of you.

**DADDY:** It’s my way of coping.

**ELLEN:** You know I’ll always cover for you with The Pest.

**DADDY:** Ellen dear. Do you think we should think of some other name for your mother?

**ELLEN:** Why? It suits her. She’s always trying to catch you drinking and she absolutely one hundred per cent disapproves of me lying here and reading and/

**DADDY:** Ellen dear. Do you think maybe you should get out more?

**ELLEN:** Why.

**DADDY:** You’re 22. Don’t you want to meet someone?

**ELLEN:** I’ve had boyfriends. Quite a number since the war ended. Klaus. Heinrich. Gunther.

**DADDY:** I’m not sure your relationships are healthy.

**ELLEN:** And yours is? Climbing in and out of your daughter’s window to avoid The Pest?

**DADDY:** But your fellows seem to climb in and out of your window too. It would be awful nice if one of them came to the front door sometime.

**ELLEN:** Some day Daddy. Now. Try tiptoeing to your study. Don’t fall over the hall table like last time.

**DADDY:** I’m glad we had this talk, Ellen.

**ELLEN:** I love you, Daddy.

**DADDY:** I love you too, dear. Try to be nicer to Mummy.

**ELLEN:** Yeah yeah. Good luck.

**December, 1953**

*1953 music. ELLEN – now 28 - is reading a magazine. The first issue of Playboy. She is finding it quite intriguing.*

**ELLEN:** I found this in Daddy’s study. It was in a drawer in his desk, in a file labeled “Boring Stuff”. Which of course made it the first place I looked. Poor Daddy is not good at the art of concealment. Lucky for him The Pest is feeling poorly these days.

It’s the very first issue of a magazine called ‘Playboy’ and in my opinion it is a giant step forward. First of all, the publisher is listed as a ‘Hugh Hefner’, which is a good German name. Likely he was born ‘Hugo’. There are women in it who look to be of Germanic persuasion. I think I may subscribe. The Pest won’t mind – it comes in a brown wrapper apparently - and when I’m done reading, I can loan them to poor Daddy and he won’t have to be so furtive. I’ll stash a new file into his desk. “Really Boring Stuff”. Though poor Daddy is so dense he’ll probably just pass by it.

Things are not going so well here. I’m 28. My window is open but, as you can see, I’m still waiting for my Bruno.

I’m thinking of branching out. I’m thinking of going Dutch. That’s a little joke. What I mean, of course, is ‘trying’ a Dutchman. I’ve studied them. They are ethnically very like Germans, visually the same but a bit taller, on average. Their English is often very good and they are industrious. They were on our side in the war which would solve the strain I have with my German lovers when that topic comes up. I’m not sure how well wooden clogs will work on the ladder, but The Pest is too ill to hear them clumping about in here and Daddy is never home anymore. Vodka calling.

Thing is. I’m 28. I should be settling down soon. And if it can’t be a German, then it can be the next best thing.

But where does one find a Dutchman? It’s not like they wear signs. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon me to seek them out. The Playboy Adviser says it is completely acceptable for a woman to propose sex to a man, as long as she does it in a non-threatening way. With Germans, I just need to mention the existence of a ladder leading to an open window, and the American paradise that awaits within. I can’t imagine the Dutch will be any less eager.

**Early Spring, 1960**

*Music to move to new era. ELLEN is pacing back and forth in front of the open window. Very impatient.*

**ELLEN:** The Dutch thing was a flop. I simply couldn’t find one. I’d see a large blond man on the train, hand him my card, he’d climb up here and turn out to be from Minneapolis. Or he wasn’t really blond. Or very interested. So I branched out: Poles, Swedes, anything with a bit of an accent that I could pretend was Bruno’s. Now that Mr. Kennedy is in the White House I’m even thinking I’ll go Irish. There are lots of them around and I’ve heard they’re exceptionally easy to convince. Where the hell is he? He’s really late.

 *(There’s a hand on the windowsill, and then DADDY pulls himself up and through.)*

It’s about time.

**DADDY:** Sorry.

**ELLEN:** I’ve had to wait up forever.

**DADDY:** It won’t happen again.

**ELLEN:** I should think not. Because your days of sneaking about are over.

**DADDY:** Is she –

**ELLEN:** Yes.

**DADDY:** When?

**ELLEN:** I took her a cup of tea at 8 and she was gone.

**DADDY:** So you weren’t there when…

**ELLEN:** No.

**DADDY:** I can start using the front door again.

**ELLEN:** Actually, better yet: you don’t have to go out if you want to get sloshed.

**DADDY:** This is rather sad. I was married to The Pest for nearly 40 years.

**ELLEN:** She was my mother for 35.

**DADDY:** She suffered so.

**ELLEN:** We let her down.

**DADDY:** A tragic life.

**ELLEN:** It’s a mercy she’s gone.

**DADDY:** No kidding.

 *(Starts to exit.)*

**ELLEN:** Where are you going?

**DADDY:** Downstairs. For a drink.

**ELLEN:** Should we call someone? She’s just lying there in her bed.

**DADDY:** I’ll phone the undertaker. Mr. O’Houlihan.

**ELLEN:** Mr. O’Who?

**DADDY:** The man who just bought out Asher and Tunney. The new mortician.

**ELLEN:** O’Houlihan?

**DADDY:** Irish chap. Red face. Will you join me for a drink while I wait?

**ELLEN:** No, I’ll stay up here. In fact, I think I’ll take to my bed. But Daddy – you’re tired and emotional. Let me make the funeral arrangements.

**DADDY:** *(Exiting.)* Thank you, Ellen – that’s very kind. A trying day, to be sure. But we’ll get through it.

 *(DADDY exits. ELLEN pauses, then runs to her bedside table and pulls out her Yellow Pages. She leafs through it furiously and then begins dialing.)*

**ELLEN:** Yes, is this the Funeral Home? Who’m I talking to? Seamus O’Houlihan. Excellent. It’s Ellen McWhirter speaking. I’d like to report a death. My mother. Will you come over? Thank you. And Mr. O apostrophe? I have a slightly unusual request. The front door has frozen shut. I’m afraid you’ll have to climb up a ladder. Will that be a problem? It’s going to be a *very lavish* funeral. Thank you. Half an hour? Slainte.

 *(Fast black.)*

**Winter, 1968**

*Music interlude to establish era. Lights come up on ELLEN, sitting on her bed. There is a long sequence with the ladder: someone is trying to climb up, with difficulty. ELLEN is aware, and impatient. A head finally appears and then falls from sight, with a sound and a thunk. The climbing starts again. Finally BRIAN appears and, with huge difficulty, falls through the open window to the floor. He’s wearing skates.*

**ELLEN:** You’re lucky Daddy’s deaf.

**BRIAN:** Daddy?

**ELLEN:** Deaf as a post.

**BRIAN:** Your father lives here?

**ELLEN:** It’s his house.

**BRIAN:** You never told me that.

**ELLEN:** It didn’t occur to me. Now. Go back to the window. Please.

**BRIAN:** Do you want me to take off my skates?

**ELLEN:** Yes/

**BRIAN:** Cuz I’d prefer not to. My fingers are cold and the laces are knotted and/

**ELLEN:** Then leave them on but for God’s sake don’t clump. Daddy’s deaf but he can feel vibrations.

  *(BRIAN clumps back to the window.)*

**BRIAN:** I fell, you know. Your ladder’s icy. It’s dangerous.

**ELLEN:** You didn’t have to wear skates.

**BRIAN:** I’m not wearing them for you. Why can’t you sleep on the ground floor?

**ELLEN:** That would be real exciting. Yawn.

**BRIAN:** And breaking my neck is?

**ELLEN:** *(Smiles.)* Yes.

**BRIAN:** You’re kinky. I like that.

**ELLEN:** OK, I’m going to pretend I’m asleep.

**BRIAN:** I like that too.

**ELLEN:** *(Asleep.)* Take off your coat.

**BRIAN:** Now we’re cooking. I like to swing. My wife and I. Someday we should get together with you and your husband, I’d like that, do you think your husband would go along with it, I mean, in the future? For now this is fine, just you and me, but back in Connecticut they have parties where couples throw their keys in a bowl and the wives pick out a set, well, I’m betting your husband would really like my wife and/

**ELLEN:** *(Waking.)* I’m not married.

**BRIAN:** What.

**ELLEN:** No husband.

**BRIAN:** But you said, “Be careful not to wake my husband.”

**ELLEN:** I think if you read my letter again, you’ll see it says “old man”. As in ‘deaf old Daddy who’s got one foot in the grave’.

**BRIAN:** But my fantasy/

**ELLEN:** Brian – telegram from Western Union beep beep de beep beep: I don’t give a hoot about *your* fantasy.

**BRIAN:** I wanted to sneak into a woman’s bedroom on ice-skates. I clearly told you this in my letter, and you seemed fine with it. And the key part of the fantasy is that your husband is somewhere on the premises, because I like an element of danger and/

**ELLEN:** Well, that’s not *my* fantasy and, since I’m hosting, we’ll do *mine*. I’ve already made enough concessions. After all, you’re ‘Brian’. That’s hardly ethnic. I don’t know what the hell the skates are about. I suppose you’re some kind of Canadian. Brian. I only asked that you come up a ladder, slip in here and pick me up in your arms like I’m 7 years old.

**BRIAN:** Whoah.

**ELLEN:** Pardon.

**BRIAN:** 7?

**ELLEN:** 7.

**BRIAN:** 7. No. Not a chance. No.

**ELLEN:** But that’s how old I was when I realized the potential of an open window.

**BRIAN:** You’re sick. That’s really sick.

**ELLEN:** *(Pause.)* 17?

**BRIAN:** That’s less sick. But in *my* fantasy you also have to be a bored housewife. A 17 year old can’t be a bored housewife. This really isn’t working. Why does everything have to get so complicated? In the summer I swim across suburban pools until I find a housewife eager to swing. June, July, August. Splish splash jump in jump out home by nine. Then, September, October, November roll around and I rest up for winter. Finally - December comes and things freeze. I skate across the pools until I find a bored housewife eager to swing. That’s in Connecticut. Tonight, however, I foolishly make an exception, turn left at Greenwich, cross one state and end up in New Jersey. And what do I find? A woman with a deaf Daddy who wants me to pretend she’s 7*. (Backing out.)* No. That’s just not something I do. Don’t get up.

*(BRIAN is gone. ELLEN arranges herself in the bed.)*

**ELLEN:** Daddy always says, “Good things come to those who wait.” One day my Bruno will come.

 *(Lights fade.)*

**Winter, 1977**

*In the dark; a disco ball begins to revolve. The sound of the BeeGees. As lights come up, ELLEN (now 53) is disco dancing with Vincent. He speaks with a thick New Jersey accent and labours to add a German tinge to it.*

**VINCENT:** …I’m just saying that dancing is not the first thing ya think of doing the day you bury your father. And who was that old guy downstairs, anyway.

**ELLEN:** Mr. Seamus O’Houlihan. The funeral director.

**VINCENT:** Well he stinks of formaldehyde.

**ELLEN:** You dance well.

**VINCENT:** You’re not bad either, for a –

**ELLEN:** For a what.

**VINCENT:** I mean for a –

**ELLEN:** You mean for a 53 year-old woman?

**VINCENT:** Well yeah. At the disco they’re usually just outa high school and such.

**ELLEN:** You should be grateful. One day older women will be in vogue and you’ll be glad you had this experience. I can teach you stuff none of those little tramps know.

**VINCENT:** Yeah, like?

**ELLEN:** Stick around and find out.

**VINCENT:** Like how to snort Metamucil probably. *(Cracks himself up at this.)* Hey, whaddya get when you mix Geritol with bourbon?

 *(ELLEN turns the music off.)*

Why’d’ya do that!?

**ELLEN:** I don’t like jokes about age.

**VINCENT:** Not my fault you’re seventy.

**ELLEN:** 53. I think you should leave.

**VINCENT:** Yeah, well, I was thinking that too. I can barely keep time to the music eh with your bones creaking outa rhythm.

**ELLEN:** Out. Out the window, use the ladder.

**VINCENT:** As if.

**ELLEN:** I’m serious. Out the window. I only let you in the front door because Mr. O’Houlihan was here and I didn’t want him to get suspicious I was entertaining.

**VINCENT:** Well picking up a guy at a disco on the night you bury your father and asking him to go up and down a ladder is weird. I’m outa here. As in, out the door.

**ELLEN:** The stuff is on the table there.

**VINCENT:** What stuff.

**ELLEN:** The stuff you can steal.

**VINCENT:** What?

**ELLEN:** Your kind steals. I’m making it easier for you. So go steal. But do it fast.

**VINCENT:** I ain’t stealing, and I ain’t going out the window.

**ELLEN:** *(Pulls out gun.)* Steal. Window.

**VINCENT:** OK OK. Easy lady. Don’t aim that at me, sheesh I’m surprised you don’t have a blunderbuss. Joke. Joke. Sorry. Didn’t your Dad tell you how to hold a gun proper. Hold it facing down. I’ll just take them silver cufflinks. You’re really serious about the window. These shoes aren’t good on ladders – OK OK OK, I’m going, I’m going…

 *(VINCENT leaves. ELLEN goes over to her bed, sits down heavily. She puts her head in her hands, defeated. Black.)*

**March, 2010**

*Music to help establish new era. As lights come up, ELLIE is moving towards her bed with her walker. With some difficulty – she’s 85. She puts an empty kerosene can under her bed, and then gets into her bed with difficulty.*

**ELLEN:** When a woman reaches 85 she has to accept the fact that her window isn’t going to slide open quite so often. In fact, my only visitors now are pizza boys. And they won’t deliver up a ladder. In fact, most of them won’t deliver here at all. They leave the pizza out on the street, and yell. When a woman reaches 85, she has to accept the fact that opportunity only knocks for the most devious.

That would be me.

 *(ELLEN picks up a cell phone and laboriously dials 911)*

Is that 9-1-1? I phoned a few minutes ago and spoke to a nice man. About a possible fire in Hopewell. 78 Franklin Street. Miss Ellen McWhirter. Oh, it was you? Well, I can confirm: there is indeed a fire and I think you should send someone around. I’m alone here, confined to my bed. The fire is getting worse. I believe it was a kerosene spill in my father’s old study, so the house could go up like that, bzzzt. The house is an old colonial, dry as dust. Full of books from previous eras. And magazines from previous mindsets. I’ve left my window open. Second floor, north side of the house.

  *(A red flashing light now.)*

I think someone is arriving. I’ll hang up now and wait for deliverance.

 *(ELLEN hangs up.)*

Nice fellow. Soothing voice. I might phone him again sometime.

 *(A ladder is pushed against her window. Footsteps up. A fireman appears with an axe.)*

Window’s open!

 *(FIREMAN clambers through, slowly and painfully.)*

There’s a fire downstairs. You’re going to have to carry me out.

**FIREMAN:** Just a second, ma’am.

 *(FIREMAN turns back to the window and begins hauling something up. He pulls it in. It’s a walker. FIREMAN turns back to ELLEN.)*

You’ll have to speak clearly and to my right ear.

**ELLEN:** You’re a bit old for a fireman.

**FIREMAN:** 85.

**ELLEN:** That’s old.

**FIREMAN:** It’s very old.

**ELLEN:** What happened to the strapping young men I see in calendars.

**FIREMAN:** They’re professionals. Hopewell’s a volunteer fire department. A dog’s breakfast of retirees, and tonight most people are home watching the basketball finals. March Madness. I never liked basketball. Soccer was my game. So it’s just me. The room below here is in flames.

**ELLEN:** That’s the study. It’s full of literature.

**FIREMAN:** Can you walk?

**ELLEN:** You’ll have to carry me.

**FIREMAN:** I’d prefer you walk.

**ELLEN:** I’m old.

**FIREMAN:** So am I.

**ELLEN:** I’m practically a cripple.

**FIREMAN:** I’m getting a knee replacement in April.

**ELLEN:** I can’t wait till then.

**FIREMAN:** I’m just saying.

**ELLEN:** If you bring your walker over, I’ll slide into the seat and you can push me over to the window.

**FIREMAN:** Good thinking.

**ELLEN:** How come I’ve never seen you around town?

**FIREMAN:** I only retired to Hopewell at Christmas. There was a sign at the post office asking for volunteer firefighters and I thought that it might be a way for me to continue living a useful and fulfilling life.

**ELLEN:** You’re 85 and you just retired?

**FIREMAN:** I owned the company. Now. Are you on? I’ll push. Wait. Where’d I put my axe? I left it in the truck again, I bet. Actually, if you don’t mind, I’ll just sit on your bed and catch my breath. We’ve still got a bit of time. I get angina. Smoke brings it on. But if I just sit still for a moment… Maybe we can talk about something, get my mind off this. *(His chest pain)*

**ELLEN:** What was your company?

**FIREMAN:** Western Union.

**ELLEN:** Oh yeah, I remember them. Telegrams.

**FIREMAN:** I began working for them when I was a teenager. Back when everything was dot dash dot. The 1940s. The war against the Hun. It was an exciting time to be in the telegram business. I couldn’t enlist because of my toe but I ended up at the Pentagon, doing translations and whatnot. And then after the war I went back to Western Union and began rising through the ranks: from office manager to regional manager to national manager to vice president to president and the whole time I was collecting stock options and eventually I just bought the place. I’ve lived the American Dream. OK. Pain’s gone. Now. *(Tries standing.)* Wow. My knee. *(Sits back down again.)* We’ve got a problem.

**ELLEN:** I’ll say. You still have to carry me down the ladder.

**FIREMAN:** Like that’s happening.

**ELLEN:** You’re a bloody fireman. You’ve come here on an emergency call to save a desperate old woman. Her home is engulfed in flames. The only option is: you pick her up in your arms and carry her down the ladder to safety.

**FIREMAN:** I’ll pop my shoulder right out of the socket.

**ELLEN:** It’s your duty dammit! Didn’t you take some sort of fireman’s pledge?

**FIREMAN:** OK OK. I’ll try. *(Tries to stand up, sits back down again.)* Oh oh.

**ELLEN:** What now!?

**FIREMAN:** Orthotic Hypotension.

**ELLEN:** Low blood pressure!?

**FIREMAN:** And my knee’s killing me.

**ELLEN:** Oh my lord. This can’t be happening to me. *(Stands up.)* OK. Here. *(Brings walker over.)* *You* sit on it.

**FIREMAN:** Give me a boost.

 *(ELLEN hoists FIREMAN.)*

**FIREMAN:** *(In pain.)* Mein gott. Be gentle, woman.

**ELLEN:** Sorry. Sorry.

 *(ELLEN maneuvers FIREMAN on to walker.)*

There. OK. Here’s what we’re doing. I’m going to push you out the door. When we get to the stairs I’ll just tip you forward a bit and you slide down the front stairs. I’ll follow you down and pull you out the door by your good leg.

**FIREMAN:** This one.

**ELLEN:** What’s your name?

**FIREMAN:** Kurt.

**ELLEN:** Ellen. Ellen McWhirter, pleased to meet you. This is not quite how I pictured things ending. But it will have to do. I had a dream and I’m adjusting it a bit. When I open the door hold your breath until you hit the bottom of the stairs. We’re going to be fine Kurt, just fine. Are you married?

**FIREMAN:** Widower.

**ELLEN:** It’s like my late Daddy used to say: ‘Good things come to those who wait.’ But you don’t want to wait too long. So Kurt. Take a deep breath. Let’s go.

 *(ELLEN opens door and pushes KURT through. Fast black.)*

**The End.**