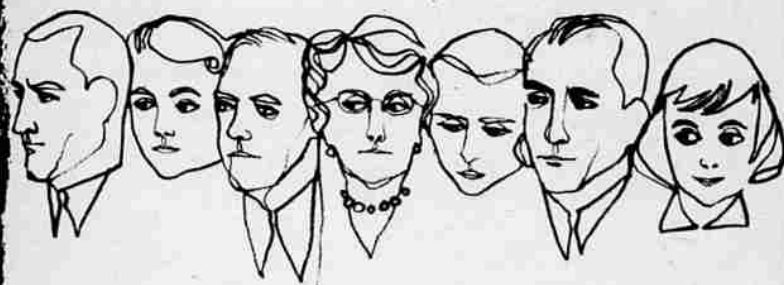




Plaintiff



Grandpa was the defendant. His crime was growing old, and he had no defenders; none, that is, until Mom spoke up . . .

"No, Dad," Uncle Cary said firmly. "It's decided. We know what's best."

"Comes now the plaintiff," Mom said. It was the first time she had spoken and she looked directly at Uncle Cary.

"What do you mean by that, Cynthia?" he said.

"Isn't that what you lawyers say when you're enumerating your complaints and reasons why someone is guilty. Aren't you the plaintiff?"

"Cynthia, your ideas about law have always been exceedingly vague. I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Now, Cynthia," Grandpa said. "Let the boys decide . . ."

"What do you really want to do, Dad?" she said.

"I want to stay where I am, but I guess it isn't practical. I might fall again or something. And I guess I don't get myself good meals. And I suppose I do worry you. It's just that I don't want to go to that old folks' hospital."

"Rest home," Uncle Cary corrected him impatiently. "But that settles it, Cynthia. Dad is in agreement."

UNCLE THOMAS smiled and rubbed his hands together and got up as if he had just settled a big deal. "And that's that!" he said. "Cary, you see about selling the house. That's your line. Let me know if I can help you. Isabel and I have to run. We're due at a party."

Uncle Cary nodded and got up, too. "Fine. I'll pick you up in the morning, Tom. We'll go out to the rest home and make arrangements. Dad, you'd better start throwing away a lot of that junk you've got around and get ready to move. I imagine Cynthia can help you."

"All right, son," Grandpa said. His voice sounded older than ever, and he was staring at his pipe, which had gone out. "If that's the way it is."

Mom glanced at Dad and they exchanged

one of their little nods. "Dad's not going to a rest home," she said.

"Cynthia!" warned Uncle Cary. "Let's not get into anything. It's decided!"

"Dad's coming to live with us," Mom said. Then she looked away from them and walked over to Grandpa and put out a hand and patted his cheek. "That is, Dad, if you will. We want you with us because you're ours and we love you."

Grandpa's eyes filled with tears and he tried to smile. "Now, Cynthia . . . there's no need to . . ."

Uncle Cary said quickly: "That's not practical. We couldn't—that is, there may be times when you can't—" He stopped speaking and you could see that they were all scared that they might have to take Grandpa once in a while, too.

Mom smiled and said, "Comes now the plaintiff again?"

"Now look here, Cynthia!" Uncle Cary was getting peeved and his face was flushed.

"Oh, Dad's guilty," Mom said. "Indeed he is. But I don't think he should be put away for his crime. I think he's still acceptable to society—at least, in the McIntyre household."

"Crime? What are you trying to insinuate?" Uncle Cary sputtered.

"The crime of growing old, I guess," Mom said. "If you live long enough, you'll be guilty some day, too. We all will."

She took Grandpa's hand and said, "Come on, Dad. We'll drive you home."

My Dad grinned as he came over and helped Grandpa to his feet and we all started for the front door. Nobody said anything, and I felt terribly proud. I knew just how Grandpa felt about going to the nursing home because that's what it was.

At the door I suddenly realized that I hadn't said anything at all. So I turned around and said it—and Uncle Cary has been sort of cool to me ever since.

"Uncle Cary," I said. "Goes now the defendant. Case dismissed!"

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