THE WATCHERS

A musical by Josh Wellman, with Doug Yetter

Based on "Miss Tempy's Watchers" by Sarah Orne Jewett

Excerpt: Scene Two, with the songs "Girls" and "What'll We Do Without Tempy"

SCENE TWO

ESSIE and SARAH ANN stand in the parlor, looking somewhat lost, in awkward silence… adjusting flowers, winding the clock. Finally, ESSIE goes to the dining room table and fetches a dress that has been laid out on it.

ESSIE

Well, I reckon we better set to sewin' the lace back on Tempy's dress, hadn't we?

SARAH ANN

Yes, I reckon we better.

(pause)

Funny. I remember her tearin' that lace on your fencepost last Easter.

ESSIE

And then she dies right close to the next Easter mornin'. One o' those things.

SARAH ANN

Yes, one o' those things.

(pause)

Why don't we sew some lace around the bottom, too?

ESSIE

What'd ya wanna do *that* for? No one'll see it.

SARAH ANN

Nobody *has* to see it. I jest think it'd be a nice thing t'do.

ESSIE

Well… if ya wanna waste your time, be my guest.

SARAH ANN

It ain't a waste as far as I can see. I think it's something nice to do for Tempy.

THEY sit at the parlor table, near the Watcher's Lamp. The dress stretches between them and they begin sewing.

After a beat, the lights shift to daytime:

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TEMPY appears with a pot of tea, the dress flies up and away, and SARAH ANN and ESSIE exchange worried glances, then look up at TEMPY.

TEMPY

Thank you both for comin' so quick. Sugar, Sarah Ann?

SARAH ANN

Why, of course! One lump.

TEMPY

Essie?

ESSIE

Two lumps.

(pause)

Okay, four lumps, since it's just us here. You know I like it sweet!

TEMPY

Sweet, she says… more like havin' some tea with yer sugar!

(forces a laugh)

SARAH ANN

What's wrong, Tempy?

ESSIE

Yes, Miss Temperance Dent – you've got worry writ all over your face.

TEMPY

(finishes putting sugar in her own tea)

Well… Am I that bad at keeping m'secret?

(pause)

So, girls… I guess I'd better just say it. I went to see Dr. Finnimore about that vex I've been feelin' in my chest. And… the not catchin' my breath, ever, anymore. And…

(pause)

Well, there's no point in pleasant lies, is there?

(pause – MUSIC underneath)

ESSIE

Why, Tempy – that's the most ridiculous thing I ever done heard!

SARAH ANN

Gracious! How can he know for sure? He can't.

ESSIE

I've been sayin' fer ages – Dr. Finnimore ain't *half* the doctor he used to be.

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TEMPY

(stands, goes to window, sings)

GIRLS.
WE WERE ONCE GIRLS.
GIRLS WHO WENT WADING IN THE CREEK.
WE WERE YOUNG.
WE WERE SILLY,
BUT WE WERE SURE…
SURE THAT LIFE WOULD YIELD
WHATEVER WE MIGHT SEEK.

GIRLS.
WE WERE JUST GIRLS.
HOW WERE WE ABLE TO MAKE THINGS SO WRONG?
Well…
WE WERE YOUNG.
WE WERE FOOLISH.
BUT WE WERE SURE.
SURE THAT WE WERE RIGHT–
WHEN WE WERE JUST HEADSTRONG.

BUT LET'S NOT GO DWELLIN' ON THE SAD THINGS,
ON THE ACHES AND MISTAKES
THAT PILE SO HIGH AS WE LIVE.

WE ALL DO GOOD THINGS AND BAD THINGS.
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.
NOBODY WON.
FORGET IT, MOVE ON AND FORGIVE.

(speaks)

I want you two to be the watchers, the night before my funeral. Please.

ESSIE

Oh, Tempy! Don't be ridiculous. *Funeral?*

SARAH ANN

We've got *plenty* of time together!

TEMPY

I don't plan on goin' quietly, mind you. I'm gonna kick up my heels till I fall over dead from dancin'.

(tries to catch her breath)

The truth is the truth. And we gotta face it. Eventually. All of us.

ESSIE

Why, you're gonna outlive us both. I just know.

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TEMPY

(sings)

NOW, GIRLS.
WE ARE NOT GIRLS.
WATCHING TOMORROWS GROWIN' FEW.
YOU'LL NEED HER.
AND SHE'LL NEED YOU.

NOTHIN'S SURE WHEN WE AIN'T YOUNG.
STILL, OUR FINAL HYMN AIN'T BEEN SUNG.
BRING BACK THOSE THREE GIRLS IN THE CREEK.
AND SEEK THEIR HOPE,
ANEW.

ESSIE

All right. I'll do it if the time comes. Even if it's downright silly, thinkin' we'll have to *any* time soon.

SARAH ANN

And of course I will, Tempy. Anything you ask. Anything.

TEMPY

Good. Then it's all settled. Thank you. And remember, you made a promise!

SHE turns, and she disappears as the lights shift to put us back into the night of The Watch. The dress flies back in. ESSIE and SARAH ANN go back to sewing, as the "Girls" melody plays. SARAH ANN puts her sewing down for a moment.

SARAH ANN

(sings)

WHAT'LL WE DO WITHOUT TEMPY?
WHO WILL LAUGH AT THE JOKES
THAT ONLY WE THREE UNDERSTOOD?

ESSIE

WHAT'LL WE DO WITHOUT TEMPY?
STUBBORN AS HECK.
PAIN IN M'NECK.
BUT FUNNY.

SARAH ANN

AND WISE.

BOTH

AND SO GOOD…

WHAT'LL *I* DO WITHOUT TEMPY?

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Music does not resolve back to A-section – the question hangs in the air.

ESSIE

Well… I daresay we done *out*done ourselves.

SARAH ANN

Tempy'd be pleased to know this dress got fixed up proper.

ESSIE

We better get it put on 'er.

THEY stand to go upstairs… youthful music plays as the parlor rotates away, to:

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