



I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC!
(OR THE ELECTRIC GRANDMOTHER)
Adapted from a story by Ray Bradbury

CAST

FATHER	<i>Widowed Father</i>
CLARA	<i>Aunt to the Children</i>
TOM	<i>Oldest Son</i>
TIMOTHY	<i>Younger Son</i>
AGATHA	<i>Daughter</i>
GRANDMOTHER	<i>Electronic Grandmother</i>
FANTOCCINI	<i>Inventor of Robots</i>

NARRATOR: Grandma! How well her grandchildren remembered the day of her birth! Wait, you say, no child remembers that. But it was so. Those grandchildren could remember the day that their wonderful, electric grandmother was born.

It all began the week that the children's world ended. Their mother was dead. One late afternoon a black car left their father and the three of them stranded on their own

front drive. They peered through the front door of their house, afraid of the echoes they might find in the halls—the sort of clamor that happens when all the furniture is taken out. And now the main piece of lovely furniture was gone forever.

FATHER: Well...let's go inside.

NARRATOR: Later that day Aunt Clara drove up the path in her big canary-colored limousine. The children heard their father and Aunt Clara shout and then speak and then shout and then speak.

CLARA: (*shouting*) Let the children come live with me!

FATHER: They'd rather kill themselves!

NARRATOR: A door slammed. Aunt Clara was gone. The children almost danced. Downstairs Father sat alone talking to himself or to a remnant ghost of Mother.

FATHER: (*murmuring*) The children need someone. I love them, but let's face it. I must work to feed us all. You love them, Ann, but you're gone. And Clara? Impossible. She loves but smothers. And as for maids and nannies—? (*sighing*)

NARRATOR: Here the father sighed, and the children sighed with him, remembering the luck they had had with maids or live-in teachers or sitters.

FATHER: What we need is a...grandmother.

TIMOTHY: But all our grandmothers are dead.

FATHER: Yes in one way. But in another way, they're not.

NARRATOR: What a fine mysterious thing for their father to say. He handed them a multicolored pamphlet. They had seen it in his hands, off and on, for many weeks, and very often during the last few days. Now, with one blink of their eyes, as they passed the paper from hand to hand, they knew why Aunt Clara had stormed from the house.

TIMOTHY: (*reading*) I Sing the Body Electric! (*pause*) What the heck does that mean?

FATHER: Read on.

NARRATOR: Agatha and Tom glanced guiltily about the room, afraid their mother might suddenly come in to find them with this blasphemy.

TIMOTHY: Fantoccini Limited. *We Shadow Forth.* Have you been worried by inattentive sitters, nannies who cannot be trusted, and well-meaning uncles and aunts? (*exclaiming*) Hey, we have!

FATHER: Read on!

TIMOTHY: Here is the answer to your problems. We have perfected the first humanoid, minicircuited, rechargeable AC-DC Electrical Grandmother.

AGATHA: Grandmother? (*to her father*) Dad, is this for real?

FATHER: Don't look at me that way. I'm half-mad with grief and half-mad thinking

of tomorrow and the day after that. Someone finish it.

TOM: I will. (*reading*) The toy that is more than a toy. The Fantoccini Electrical Grandmother is built with loving precision to give the incredible precision of love to your children.

TIMOTHY: How great!

AGATHA: Shut up!

TOM: We do not sell our Creation to able-bodied families. Nothing can replace the parent in the home. However there are families where death or ill health...

FATHER: Stop! Don't go on. Even I can't stand it.

TIMOTHY: Why? I was just getting interested. Do they really have these things?

FATHER: Let's not talk any more about it. It was a mad thought—

TOM: Not so mad. I mean, heck, whatever they built couldn't be worse than Aunt Clara!

(*laughter from everyone*)

NARRATOR: They hadn't laughed in months. When they stopped laughing, they looked at the pamphlet.

TOM: Well?

AGATHA: I—I'm not ready.

TIMOTHY: We do need something pretty badly right now.

TOM: I have an open mind.

AGATHA: We can try it. Sure. But tell me this—will it make our real mother come home to stay?

NARRATOR: There was a single gasp from the family as if, with one shot, she had struck them all in the heart. None of them stopped crying the rest of that night.

But later Father decided that it would be best to order an Electric Grandmother. (*sound of a helicopter*) On a clear, bright day soon after, a helicopter carried the family lightly up and over and down through the skyscrapers of the city and let them out on top of a building where large letters could be read from the sky: FANTOCCINI.

AGATHA: What does Fantoccini mean?

FATHER: It's an Italian word for shadow puppets, I think—or dream people.

NARRATOR: The helicopter went away, and the family sank down in an elevator as their stomachs sank up. They stepped out onto a moving carpet that streamed away—a blue river of wool. All about them hung from the ceilings on wires and strings were puppets and marionettes.

AGATHA: I hope the robots won't be like those puppets. Father, you gave me one of those dumb things with strings two years ago. The strings were in a zillion knots by dinnertime.

FANTOCCINI: Then we shall see what we can do to eliminate the strings.

NARRATOR: The carpet had stopped at a desk with a man behind it. It had been he

who had spoken. The man had the cleverness not to smile. Children are put off by older people who smile too much. They smell a catch, right off.

FANTOCCINI: Guido Fantoccini, at your service. For your Electric Grandmother there will be no strings, Miss Agatha Simmons, aged eleven. Here's how we will do it.

NARRATOR: He reached forward and placed a golden key in Agatha's hand.

AGATHA: You wind her up instead of using strings? Impossible!

FANTOCCINI: God's truth. Here is the key to your Do-It-Yourself, Select-Only-the-Best, Electrical Grandmother. You're in charge. You, Agatha, are guardian of the key.

NARRATOR: She looked at it suspiciously.

FANTOCCINI: This way, please. Step onto the green moving stream. Walk on the water, please.

NARRATOR: They stepped onto a green river of carpeting that floated forever through hallways and dim cavern-like rooms. There were voices in the darkness of these rooms like the voices of various Oracles. (*sounds of women speaking*)

FANTOCCINI: Listen. You will hear the voices of all kinds of women. Find just the right one for your Electric Grandmother.

NARRATOR: They listened to all the high, low, soft, loud, in-between, half-scolding,

half-affectionate voices saved from times before they were born.

FANTOCCINI: Speak! Yell! We will use your voice.

TIMOTHY: Hello. You there! This is Timothy!

TOM: What shall I say? Hello!

NARRATOR: Agatha walked backward on the moving carpet—her mouth tight. Father took her hand. She cried out.

AGATHA: Let go! No, no! I won't have my voice used! I won't!

FANTOCCINI: Excellent.

NARRATOR: Fantoccini touched three dials on a small machine he held in his hand. On the side of the small machine they saw three voice patterns mix, blend, and repeat their cries. Then a voice spoke from a far electronic deep:

GRANDMA: Nefertiti.

NARRATOR: They all froze.

AGATHA: What does *that* mean?

TOM: I know. Nefertiti is Egyptian for "The Beautiful One Is Here."

TIMOTHY: (*in awe*) The Beautiful One Is Here.

NARRATOR: They all turned to stare into that deep far place from which the good, warm, soft voice came. And she was indeed

there—still invisible. But, by her voice, they could tell she was beautiful.

FANTOCCINI: The voice is the most important part. Now let's argue about details—other weights and measures your grandmother will have.

TOM: She should not be bony and cut us when she hugs us.

TIMOTHY: But she shouldn't be so fat that we sink out of sight when she squeezes us.

TOM: When she touches us, she shouldn't feel cold—like marble.

TIMOTHY: But she should not be hot either—like an oven! She should just be warm. The nice temperature of a baby-chick—like when you hold one in your hand.

NARRATOR: Oh, they were great ones for detail. They fought and argued and cried, and Timothy won on the color of her eyes, for reasons to be known later.

FANTOCCINI: Hair color? You can choose from a thousand different strands.

AGATHA: I'll be in charge of that. You boys will mess that up.

NARRATOR: Although she was still reluctant, Agatha chose the hair color. Then when all the details were chosen, they went home—to wait. It was very clever of the Fantoccini people. How? They made them wait all summer. Then on August 29, Timothy spoke.

TIMOTHY: I have this feeling that it's today.

NARRATOR: They all went out after breakfast to sit on the lawn. Suddenly, the clouds above their house opened wide and let forth a helicopter like Apollo driving his chariot across mythological skies. (*sound of a helicopter*) The helicopter slid wide a bottom drawer and deposited upon the grass a parcel of largish size. No sooner having laid the parcel down, the helicopter shot straight up.

TIMOTHY: What is it?

TOM: What else can it be? It's she! She must be in the box! And look! There's a crowbar taped to the top of lid.

NARRATOR: The boys seized it and began to pry and creak and squeal the boards off, one by one. (*creaking of a crate being opened*) Agatha snuck up to watch. The last pine plank fell away. Timothy and Tom gasped. Agatha, between them now, gasped, too. For inside the immense raw pine package was the most beautiful idea anyone ever dreamt and built. (*cries of astonishment from the children*) Inside the opened box was...a mummy case, a sarcophagus!

AGATHA: It can't be!

TOM: Is that real gold!? Real hieroglyphics! Run your fingers over them!

TIMOTHY: It's just like in the museums!

NARRATOR: And the golden mask face of the woman carved on the sarcophagus lid looked back at them with just the merest smile which hinted at their joy. Not only

did she have a sun-metal face stamped and beaten out of purest gold, but her eyes were jewels. And as their eyes ran down her hieroglyphics, it came to all three of them at the same instant. The symbols didn't speak tales of the past. They were hieroglyphics of the Future.

AGATHA: There's me! Me in sixth grade!

TIMOTHY: There's me in high school!

TOM: There's me in college.

NARRATOR: Then they pried up the bright sarcophagus lid and put the lid aside. And within the sarcophagus, of course, was the true mummy! And she was like the image carved on the lid, but more so, more beautiful, more touching. She was human-shaped and shrouded all in new fresh bandages of linen. And upon her hidden face was an identical golden mask, younger than the first, but somehow, strangely wiser.

TIMOTHY: Look! There are symbols on the strips of cloth!

TOM: This one's for me, and there's one for you, Tim. And you, too, Agatha.

NARRATOR: Each of them seized and began to unwind his or her piece of linen! The lawn was soon a mountain of linen. The woman beneath the covering lay there, waiting.

AGATHA: Oh, no. She's dead, too!

TOM: Idiot. She's not dead or alive. Where's your key?

AGATHA: Key?

TIMOTHY: Yeah, dummy! The key the man gave you to wind her up!

NARRATOR: Agatha's hand spidered along her blouse to where the key hung. She had strung it there, against her own skeptic's muttering, and now she held it in her sweaty palm. Then she thrust the key through the bandage at the navel. (*whirring sound*) The Electrical Grandmother's eyes flicked wide! Something began to hum and whirl. Tim wanted to be part of the game. He wrenched the key. Grandma's nostrils flared!

TOM: Me, too!

NARRATOR: Tom grabbed the key and gave it a huge twist! Grandma suddenly sat up. They leapt back. She was born! Her head swiveled all about. She gaped. She mouthed. And the first thing she said was:

GRANDMA: (*sound of a woman's laugh*)

NARRATOR: It was a good laugh, full and rich and hearty. She was awake now. They had awakened her. She climbed out of her sarcophagus, out of her winding sheet, stepping forth, brushing off, looking around as for a mirror. She found it—the reflections in their eyes. Agatha, at the instant of Grandma's birth, had leapt to hide on the porch. The Electrical Person pretended not to notice. She turned slowly on the green lawn near the shady street, gazing all about with new eyes, her nostrils moving as if she breathed the actual air. Her gaze fixed upon Timothy.

GRANDMA: You must be—?

TIMOTHY: Timothy. Tim.

GRANDMA: And you must be—?

TOM: Tom.

NARRATOR: How clever again of the Fantoccini Company. They knew the children's names. She knew. But they had taught her to pretend not to know. That way the children could feel great. They were the teachers, telling her what she already knew!

GRANDMA: Now isn't there another boy?

AGATHA: Girl!

NARRATOR: A disgusted voice cried from somewhere on the porch.

GRANDMA: Isn't her name...Alicia?

AGATHA: Agatha!

GRANDMA: Agatha.

NARRATOR: The woman touched the word with proper affection.

GRANDMA: Well, Agatha, Timothy, Thomas, let me look at you.

TIMOTHY: No. Let us look at you.

NARRATOR: Tom and Timothy walked in great slow circles round about her. She made a sound like a season all to herself, a morning early in June when the world wakes to find everything absolutely perfect. Agatha remained on the porch. But her eyes followed all that was done and said.

TIMOTHY: Hey! Your eyes are the exact same color as my favorite marbles.

GRANDMA: Of course. What could be better than that?

TIMOTHY: (*happily*) Nothing!

NARRATOR: Grandma's beautiful eyes moved to Tom.

GRANDMA: And you, Master Tom? What can I do for you?

NARRATOR: Grandma turned, and there was Tom's old kite strewn on the lawn. She recognized its problem.

GRANDMA: The string's broken. No. The ball of string's lost. You can't fly a kite that way. Here.

NARRATOR: She bent. How could a robot grandma fly a kite for them? She raised up, the kite in her hands.

GRANDMA: Fly.

NARRATOR: And the kite flew. From the tip of her index finger there sprang a thin bright strand of spider web that fixed to the kite and let it soar a thousand feet high on the summer winds.

TIMOTHY: Wow!

AGATHA: (*cry of surprise*) Ah!

GRANDMA: If you think that is high, watch this!

NARRATOR: With a hiss, a whistle, a hum, the fishline sung out. The kite went up another thousand feet.

TOM: It can't be! Wait 'til I show my friends!

GRANDMA: I make this fiber as I need it. It's liquid inside me—like a spider. It hardens when it hits the air. Instant thread.

NARRATOR: She broke the thread and wrapped it about Tom's fist three times. Then the Grandma said, without turning, without looking.

GRANDMA: And what about Abigail—?

AGATHA: Agatha!

GRANDMA: Agatha, how shall we make do?

AGATHA: No way! We'll never be friends!

GRANDMA: (*echoing*) Never be friends.

NARRATOR: The children were shocked. The Grandma was cupping her hands like a seashell, and from within that shell the echo sounded.

GRANDMA: (*still echoing*) Friends...

AGATHA: No!

GRANDMA: (*still echoing*) No!

NARRATOR: Agatha ran inside the house and slammed the door. And that was the first day.

And there was a second day, of course, and a third and a fourth. But at least by the

end of the first ten days, Agatha no longer fled, but stood in nearby doors, or sat in distant chairs under trees. And the Grandma? She merely waited. She never tried to urge or force. She went about her cooking and baking apricot pies and left foods carelessly here and there for Agatha. An hour later, the plates were empty, there was Agatha sliding down the banister, a mustache of crumbs on her lip.

And the most peculiar and beautiful and strange and lovely thing was the way she seemed to give complete attention to all of three of the children.

She listened—she really listened to all they said. She knew and remembered every syllable, word, sentence, punctuation, thought, and rambunctious idea.

Sometimes the children decided to test her. In the midst of his babbling one day, Tom stopped and asked.

TOM: What did I just say?

GRANDMA: Oh, er—

TOM: Come on! Spit it out!

GRANDMA: I think I have it here.

NARRATOR: The Grandma rummaged in her purse and from the depths drew forth a fortune cookie.

GRANDMA: Fresh baked. Still warm. Tom, open it.

NARRATOR: It was almost too hot to touch. Tom broke the cookie shell and pressed the warm curl of paper out to read it.

TOM: (*reading*) I'm going to be the bicycle champ of the whole west! What did I just say? Come on, spit it out!

NARRATOR: His jaw dropped.

TOM: How did you do that?

GRANDMA: We have our little secrets. That's the only Chinese fortune cookie that predicts the Immediate Past. Have another?

NARRATOR: Tom cracked the second shell and read:

TOM: (*reading*) How did you do that? (*laugh*) Ha! That's the last thing I said.

NARRATOR: Tom popped the messages and the piping hot shells into his mouth and began to run. That was another great thing about the Grandma—she could keep up. She never beat him or won the race, but she stayed right up with him, which a boy doesn't mind. A girl ahead of him or beside him is too much to bear. But a girl one or two paces back is a respectful thing, and allowed. So Grandma and Tom had some great runs, him in the lead, and both talking a mile a minute.

But now you must know the best part of the electric grandma. They might not have known at all if Timothy hadn't taken some pictures, or Tom hadn't taken some, too, and then compared.

TOM: In each picture, Grandma looks different! Here's one of Grandma near Agatha. And, in it, Grandma looks like her. And in this one, posed with Timothy, she looks like Timothy! And this last one, jogging along with me, she looks like ugly old me! Those Fantoccini people are clever!

NARRATOR: There were other details, too. When the Grandma was doing algebra lessons with Agatha her eyes were a different color than when she was playing with Tim. And her skin changed tones, too, to reflect the nearest child. The bones of her face also shifted subtly beneath the flesh to assume a shape similar to each child.

Tom was the first to notice it, and it became fascinating for him to watch and try to catch the electric grandma as she performed her changes. She had only one face for one person at a time. So in crossing a room, having touched one child, on the way, the wondrous shift went on beneath the skin, and by the time she reached the next child, the true mother of that child she was! And when all three of them were present and chattering at the same time? Well, then, the changes were miraculously soft, small, and mysterious.

All of the children admired the Grandma—except Agatha who refused to the bitter last.

GRANDMA: Agamemnon...

NARRATOR: This misnaming had become a jovial game now. Even Agatha didn't mind, but she still pretended to mind.

AGATHA: Agamemnon! That's the worst yet!

NARRATOR: Agatha laughed, which made Grandma make one of her rare mistakes. She put out her hand to give Agatha the merest pat.

AGATHA: No!

NARRATOR: The girl leapt to her feet and withdrew swiftly from the room.

TOM: What was that all about?

TIMOTHY: It's obvious! I suspect it is because Agatha is beginning to like Grandma. The more Agatha likes Grandma, the more she hates herself for liking her.

NARRATOR: The boys watched Grandma in her battle of wits and stratagems with what's-her-name. What breakfasts, lunches, and dinners there were at their house!

GRANDMA: Here's Mystery Breakfast Number Nine! Perfectly dreadful! Made from plastic food bags, parsley, and gum from under theatre seats. It made me want to throw up while I was cooking it!

NARRATOR: Even while wondering how a robot could be sick, the children could hardly wait to shovel it down. Father, too, had put on ten pounds. Even Agatha drew near and circled round the table at such times. When Agatha did not come to meals, they were left by her door with a skull and crossbones on a small flag stuck in them.

FATHER: Where is Agatha? (*yelling*) Agatha!

GRANDMA: One day she'll come. She'll sit. It's a matter of time.

TOM: What's wrong with her?

TIMOTHY: She's nuts.

GRANDMA: No. She's afraid.

TOM: Of you?

GRANDMA: Not of me so much as what I might do.

TOM: You'd never hurt her!

GRANDMA: No, but she thinks I might. We must wait for her to find that her fears have no foundation. If I fail, well, I will send myself to the showers and rust away quietly.

NARRATOR: Grandma finished serving everyone and then sat at the other side of the table facing Father and pretended to eat. They never found out what she did with the food. She was a sorcerer. It simply vanished. As Father ate, his eyes filled with tears.

FATHER: This food. I've had it before. In a small French restaurant in Paris—twenty-five years ago. How do you do it?

NARRATOR: He looked over the table at this remarkable creature, this device, this what? Woman?

GRANDMA: I am given things, which I then give to you. The giving goes on. You ask what I am? Why a machine. But even in that answer we know that I am more than a machine. I am all the people who thought of me and planned me and built me and set me running. So I am people. I am all the things they wanted to be and perhaps could not be, so they built a wondrous toy to represent those things.

FATHER: It's strange. When I was growing up, there was a huge outcry at machines. Machines were bad, evil. We thought they might dehumanize us humans.

GRANDMA: Some machines do. It's all in the way they are built. It's all in the way they are used. A rifle is a machine that

wounds and kills. Well, I am no rifle. I am a grandmother machine, which means more than a machine.

FATHER: How can you be more than what you seem?

GRANDMA: No man is as big as his own idea. Therefore, any machine that embodies an idea is larger than the man that made it. And what's so wrong with that?

TIMOTHY: What? I got lost back there about a mile back. Come again?

GRANDMA: Oh, dear. I hate to get philosophical during dinner. Let me put it this way. We're in a new age where we can think up a Big Idea and place it in a machine. That makes the machine more than a machine, doesn't it?

TIMOTHY: I guess.

GRANDMA: Well, isn't a motion-picture camera and projector more than a machine? It's a thing that dreams! Sometimes it brings fine, happy dreams. Sometimes it brings nightmares. But to call it simply a machine is ridiculous.

FATHER: You must have been invented by someone who loved machines and hated people who said all machines were bad or evil.

GRANDMA: Exactly. Guido Fantoccini grew up among machines and he couldn't stand the clichés anymore. Those lies that people tell and pretend they are truths absolute. Man will never fly. That was a cliché truth for a thousand years which turned out to be a lie only a few years ago.

Well, now, how many times have you heard how inhuman machines are, in your life? All machines destroy, all machines are cold, thoughtless, awful. But the truth is—machines are what people make them. Everything is shaped to be either bad or good.

NARRATOR: Grandma circled the table, refilling our glasses with clear cold mineral spring water from the spigot in her left forefinger. Agatha, hiding around the corner, let out a cry of anguish.

AGATHA: But you never make mistakes! You're perfect! You're better than anyone ever!

GRANDMA: Not perfect. But being mechanical, I cannot sin, cannot be bribed, cannot be greedy or jealous or mean or small. Tell me how you would like to be: kind, loving, considerate—and let me run ahead on the path to explore those ways to be just that. In the darkness ahead, turn me as a lamp in all directions. I can guide your feet.

NARRATOR: Grandma was busy clearing the table, taking the plates, studying each face as she passed, touching Timothy's and Tom's cheek, her voice a quiet river of certainty bedded in their needful house and lives.

FATHER: But what about all this talk of love and attention and stuff? Good grief, woman, you're—you're—not in there!

NARRATOR: He gestured to the hidden sensory cells behind the eyes, the miniaturized storage vaults and circuits.

GRANDMA: No. I may not be in here. But you are. You and Thomas and Timothy and Agatha. Everything you ever say, everything you ever do, I'll keep it, put it away, treasure it. I shall be all the things a family forgets it is.

FATHER: But can you love us?

GRANDMA: What is Love? Perhaps we may find that love is the ability of someone to give *you* back to you. Maybe love is handing *you* back to yourself just a trifle better.

FATHER: But love? Real love?

GRANDMA: If paying attention is love, I am love. If knowing is love, I am love. If helping you to be good is love, I am love. There are four of you. Each of you, in a way never possible before in history, will get my *complete* attention. No matter if you all speak at once, I can channel and hear each one of you clearly. No one will go hungry for attention. I will, if you please accept the strange word, *love* you all.

AGATHA: I don't accept your love! I won't give you permission to love me! You can't! I won't let you! It's lies! You lie. No one loves me. Mother said she did, but she lied!

FATHER: Agatha!

AGATHA: Mother said she loved me! And you're like her! I hate her. Now, I hate you!

NARRATOR: Agatha spun about and leapt down the hall. The front door slammed wide. Father was in motion, but Grandma touched his arm.

GRANDMA: Let me.

NARRATOR: She moved swiftly, gliding down the hall and then running very fast out the door.

Running blindly, Agatha made the curb and ran out in the street. Suddenly a car screeched its brakes, its horn shrieking. (*horn honking*)

AGATHA: (*scream of fright*) Ah!

NARRATOR: The Grandma hurled Agatha aside, and the car struck the electrical creation instead. (*crashing noise*) Over and over the grandma spun and then lay very still. One scream was pulled out of all the family's throats at the same raw instant. (*cry of fright from the family*)

FATHER: Oh no! Please no!

NARRATOR: Agatha, intact, turned her gaze to the tossed woman's body and tears fell from her eyes.

AGATHA: (*weeping*) It's like I said. I told you. Lies! Lies!

NARRATOR: The family gathered around Agatha and held her—just like a prayer meeting there in the middle of the street. The Grandma still lay motionless nearby.

AGATHA: O Mom, dead, and now Grandma dead. She promised always, always, always to love!

GRANDMA: Of course. How foolish of me!

NARRATOR: The heads of the family all jerked up. The Grandma had risen and was standing there on the edge of their circle.

ALL: Grandma!

NARRATOR: They could only stare up at her in disbelief.

AGATHA: You're dead! The car—

GRANDMA: Hit me? Yes. And threw me in the air and tumbled me over. For a few moments there was a severe concussion of circuitries. I might have feared a disconnection—if *fear* is the word. But then I sat up and gave myself a shake. I am an unbreakable thing. Here I am.

AGATHA: I thought you were—

GRANDMA: It's only natural to think that. I mean, anyone else, hit like that, but, O my dear Agatha, not me. And now I see why you were afraid and never trusted me. You didn't know that I am forever.

NARRATOR: Agatha had new tears brimming her eyes, but a different kind of tears, not tears that drowned, but tears that washed clean.

GRANDMA: Do you understand, I shall always, always be here? Do you see now, Abigail?

AGATHA: Agatha. And, yes, I do.

NARRATOR: They all broke down into weeping, huddled together in the street, and cars drew up and stopped to see just how many people were hurt and how many people were getting well right there.

End of story. Well, not quite the end. They lived happily on. Grandma was a constant, a clock, a pendulum, a face to tell all time by at noon, never gone, never away, always waiting, always speaking kind words. Until at last, one by one, it was time for the children to go away to school, and when at last the youngest, Agatha, was all packed, why Grandma packed up, too.

On the last day of summer that last year, they found Grandma down in the front room with various packets and suitcases, knitting, waiting.

AGATHA: Grandma! What are you doing?

GRANDMA: Why going off to college—in a way—just like you. I'm going back to Guido Fantoccini's—back to the Family.

TIMOTHY: The family? Family of what?

GRANDMA: Our family of Pinocchios. That's what Mr. Fantoccini called us for a joke at first. And he called himself Gepetto. Then he called us the Fantoccini, the puppets. Anyway, you have been my family here. Now I go back to my even larger family there, my brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, all robots who—

AGATHA: What do they do?

GRANDMA: It all depends. Some stay, some linger. Others go to be drawn and quartered, you might say. Their parts are distributed to other machines who have need of repairs. They'll weigh and find me wanting or not wanting. It may be I'll be just the one they need tomorrow and off I'll go to raise another batch of children.

AGATHA: Oh, they mustn't tear you apart! I'll pay anything to stop that from happening!

GRANDMA: Well, I wouldn't have said, but now you ask and I'll tell. For a very small fee, there's a room where thirty or forty of the Electric Women sit and rock and talk, each in her turn. I'll be with all the others like me listening to what they've learned of the world and, in my turn, telling how it was with Tom and Tim and Agatha. And I'll tell all I learned from you.

TOM: But *you* taught *us*!

GRANDMA: Do you really think that? No, it was learning both ways. And it's all in here. I have it all.

NARRATOR: Grandma touched her chest.

GRANDMA: The others will tell their life to me. We'll sit there, growing wiser and calmer and better every year. And we'll be waiting there in that sitting room, should you ever need us for your own children. There we'll be—growing old but not aging—getting closer to the time, perhaps, someday, when we live up to our first strange joking name.

TIMOTHY: The Pinocchios?

NARRATOR: Grandma nodded.

TOM: Pinocchio grew so worthy and fine that the gift of life was given to him. Will that happen to you?

NARRATOR: The children pictured the entire room of Fantoccini, sharing their stories and philosophy, waiting for that

day—the day that would never come. Grandma must have read that sad, impossible thought in their eyes.

GRANDMA: We'll see. Let's just wait and see.

AGATHA: Oh, Grandma! You don't have to wait. You're alive. You've always been alive to us!

NARRATOR: Agatha caught hold of the old woman, and then they all did for a long moment. Then they left for faraway schools and long years. Her last words to them before they let the helicopter swarm them away were these:

GRANDMA: When you are very old and you have grown child-like again—when you are in need of feeding and care—send for me. I will come back. I shall inhabit the nursery again. Never fear.

TIMOTHY: Ha! Oh, Grandma, we shall never be old!

TOM: Never! Never!

NARRATOR: And then they were gone. And the years flew by.

Tim and Agatha and Tom found themselves old. Their children were grown and gone, their wives and husbands vanished from the earth. And they all three found themselves by coincidence living in the old house—all alone. And now even though they had grown old, sometimes they could still hear Grandma ticking, humming above their beds in the gentle dark. They realized that they needed her once again.

TOM: We need Grandma.

TIMOTHY: (*old voice*) Then let's send for her.

AGATHA: (*old voice*) Grandma! You said you'd come back when we had need.

TIMOTHY: We are surprised by age, by time.

TOM: (*old voice*) We are old. We need you.

NARRATOR: On a day soon after Agatha, Tim, and Tom were awakened by the sound of a delivery machine settling down in the lawn. (*helicopter sounds*) The mummy case had arrived.

TOM: She is back! She is back!

NARRATOR: Old Agatha fumbled for the gold key that had forever hung around her neck—warmed and waiting.

AGATHA: Will it wind, after all these years?

TIMOTHY: Will it work? Oh, I hope it will!

TOM: Let's go! Let's see!

NARRATOR: Three old children rushed forward onto the lawn to find out.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you purchase an Electric Grandmother if you had a chance? Explain.
2. Could you love a machine as much as you love a human being? Explain.
3. How does the idea of an eternal grandmother satisfy our deepest human longings?

4. What gift does the Electric Grandmother give to her family?
5. When reading this story for the first day, did you fear that the Electric Grandmother would do something horrible to the family? Explain.
6. Even though this story is classified as science fiction, are any of its events somewhat magical or supernatural? Explain.
7. What grand idea does the Electric Grandmother embody? Explain.
8. What are some of the miraculous and exciting things the Electric Grandmother can do? What do they add to this story?
9. Why does Agatha resist the Grandmother so much?
10. Why does Agatha accept the Grandmother after she realizes that she is indestructible?
11. Read the Grandmother's definition of love on pg. 11. Do you agree with this definition? What would you add or subtract from it? Explain.
12. Is the Electric Grandmother real or artificial? Think deeply about your answer.
13. Can machines dehumanize us? Think about machines that isolate people from one another or take lives.
14. If this is so, would it be possible for machines to humanize us, too—as the Electric Grandma did for her family? Explain.
15. Is the Electric Grandmother right, are machines what we make them to be?