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Walking the Tightrope

Rebeca Wallin

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Play Review

**Title:** Walking the Tightrope  
**Author:** Mike Kenny  
**Reviewer:** Rebeca Wallin  
**Publisher:** Plays for Young Audiences  
**Publication Year:** 2000  
**Number of Pages:** 28  
**Production Requirements:** Full or stylized set with 4 locations; simple, modern day costumes; simple props

**Estimated Run Time:** 1 hour  
**Number of Acts:** 1  
**Number of Characters:** 2  
**Cast Requirements:** 1 male 1 female  
**Time Period:** present day  
**Reading/Interest Level:** Primary, Intermediate  
**Rating:** Excellent

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**Review**

Every year at the end of the summer, Esme goes to visit her Granddad Stan and Nanna Queenie. Most things stay the same each year, but this year Nanna is gone. Grandad tells her that Nanna has left to join the circus to follow her lifelong dream of becoming a tightrope walker. Esme struggles to accept this change and wonders why they can’t call or see her while Grandad struggles to find the courage to tell Esme the truth. They go through the motions of a normal summer holiday, but missing Nanna casts a shadow over everything. When Esme sees a notice that the circus is in town she convinces Grandad to take her and they see a far off tightrope walker who performs and then disappears. That night, Esme is finally able to if Nanna has died, and Stan finds the strength to tell her that she has. The play ends on a hopeful note with Esme able to deal with her grief and look forward to more summers with Grandad where some things will stay the same and some things will change.

The script bravely broaches a difficult subject and guides children through the levels of denial, sadness, and acceptance that accompany heartbreaking life events. Especially noteworthy is the portrayal of an adult that also does not know exactly how to deal with his sadness and perhaps makes mistakes along the way. The small cast and short running time make this script ideal for an educational tour, especially with the opportunity for post-show discussions about healthy approaches to dealing with grief and difficult situations. The script also has many poetic and lyrical lines woven through the script such as, “Some things stay the same, and some things change,” and, “Tide comes in, tide goes out; at the end of the day, it all washes away and back comes something else.” These lines set up the backdrop of change that is our world.