

"The Gifts We Leave"
by Michael Ivory, Jr.

Description: John has never fully understood his grandmother and her eccentric spiritual ways. He just knows that he enjoys spending time with her. One day, John begins to question her on her ways, and in the process learns what it is she has been trying to offer him for so long.

Characters

John: 15 years old, Black boy.

Grandma Violet: 65 years old, Black woman.

SFX: The rhythmic snap of green beans, followed by the hollow plastic thud of the beans into the bowl. The snap continues periodically as the conversation persists.

VIOLET: [muttering] ...I knew I should've bought some frozen green beans.

John, you listening? Now, when you dream of fish, that means somebody is pregnant.

JOHN: Uh-huh...

VIOLET: Water means trouble.

JOHN: Right.

VIOLET: Snakes—now you need to pray if you dream of snakes, the devil is *real* busy.

JOHN: Yup.

SFX: Bean-snapping ceases.

VIOLET: You listening, boy?

JOHN: Yeah, grandma

VIOLET: Then what does a dream of shit mean?

JOHN: Grandma, *what?* A dream of—

VIOLET: Don't you cuss me.

JOHN: Grandma there is no such thing as a dream of...doo-doo.

VIOLET: Sure is. I had it last night.

JOHN: [skeptically] And what does it mean?

VIOLET: You'd know if you'd've been listening.

JOHN: Grandma, what does this all mean anyway, huh? Why you telling me about dreams today? Matter fact, every time I come over here it's another thing. How to keep a witch out ya windows. How to pray over oil. Ain't that stuff you was supposed to teach mama?

SFX: A brief silence, a shifting of fabric as Violet adjusts her cotton gown. Then, a sigh and the resumed, almost musical, snapping of beans.

VIOLET: John, I know about you.

JOHN: ...ma'am?

VIOLET: You...are not wrong. This is something the women usually pass to our daughters. How to see. How to know...but your mother—she didn't take to it well. And then I had a dream...there was a vine that got snipped. I figured that meant the gift would end with me. And your mother was proof.

But then...the dream kept repeating, except with each dream, the vine grew back just a little bit. Until one day the vine had this tender little flower on it. It was shy—

JOHN: A "shy" flower?

VIOLET: [clears throat loudly] Boy, I mean it bloomed slow. But eventually, it did bloom and it was beautiful. Almost brought tears to my eyes. And when I woke up from that blooming flower...your mother was pregnant with you.

JOHN: Grandma what are you—

VIOLET: [insistently] *And as you grew up...I just...knew you weren't like the other boys in the family. I thought you were just gentle. But then I had another dream...everybody's heart went one way and yours went another.*

SFX: A heavy, burdened silence. Beans snapping a few more counts before she sets the bundle of remaining beans down and slides the bowl aside.

VIOLET: John...I want you to know ain't nothing wrong with the love you got. I teach about knowing what dreams mean, because your heart can hold the gift your mother's didn't. I know you feel like hiding, but I want you to hear your dreams when they call you. This that we do, that ain't woman's work. It's heart work. You hear me? John?

JOHN: ...Yes ma'am.

VIOLET: I know it's heavy. I know that daughter of mine don't understand either. But I *also* know you ain't like her. You can pretend the dreams don't mean nothing to you, but one day you'll let the light in. And when that happens, you stand tall. You understand?

JOHN: Yes, Grandma.

VIOLET: Uh-uh, alright now. You mind what I say, now. Just like I can read dreams, I know hearts. Don't make me tell you about yourself.

JOHN: [scoffs and chuckles] Okay, grandma...

VIOLET: You laugh now, but try me [laughs along with John, who is still laughing at his grandma's show of toughness] Hush up, and help me snap these, since you sitting there like you plan on eating.

JOHN: ...Grandma?

VIOLET: Yes, baby.

JOHN: I love you.

VIOLET: And I've loved you since before you were in my dreams.

SFX: The bowl slides back. The bean snapping continues, this time in tandem.