

***BECAUSE OF
BETH***

*by
Elana Gartner*

BECAUSE OF BETH

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BECAUSE OF BETH

In Memory of Debra

and

In Memory of Terry

BECAUSE OF BETH

Because of Beth was originally produced by Small Pond Entertainment at Workshop Theater in New York, New York featuring the following cast:

Cara.....Elizabeth Ruelas
Penny.....Hyosun Choi
Stanley.....George Raboni
Robert.....David Douglas
Waitress.....Susan Graham

Directed by Clara Barton Green

Because of Beth received its second production at Little Howick Theatre in Auckland, New Zealand, featuring the following cast:

Cara.....Emma-Mae Eglinton
Penny.....Emily Briggs
Stanley.....Terry Hooper
Robert.....Julian Harrison

Directed by Pam Browne

Cast: 2W, 2M, 1M/F/NB

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

CARA	(she/her) Early 20's, Penny's older sister.
PENNY	(she/her) 15 years old. Cara's younger sister.
STANLEY	(He/him) 50's, Beth's fiancé.
ROBERT	(He/him) 50's, long-lost father of Penny and Cara.
WAITRESS	(She/he/they) Any age.

TIME: 1990's

PLACE: An apartment in Chestertown, Maryland

BECAUSE OF BETH

BECAUSE OF BETH

ACT I
SCENE 1

It is a bedroom. CARA is asleep in bed. Strewed about her, on the floor and on the bed, are old papers, stacks of things, and a box. There is a suitcase in one corner, open. The room is bright with daylight from a window. There is sudden loud shouting from off-stage and the slam of a door. Cara bolts upright.

PENNY. (OS) Cara! Cara!

STANLEY. (OS) Penny...

PENNY. (OS) Leave me alone! Cara, where are you?! (Cara shoves the papers into the box and pushes it under the bed. She gets back in bed.)

STANLEY. (OS) Penny, we're all going through a lot! /Just...

PENNY (OS). /Get away from me! You don't understand! She left me alone! Cara! Cara! (Enter PENNY, crying.) You left me alone!

CARA. Haven't you ever heard of knocking?

PENNY. And you're still in bed! I can't believe you!

CARA. Oh, for God's sake, Penny. Did you have another bad dream? Look, if you want to get in bed, here.

PENNY. A bad dream? No! Mom's funeral! You left me alone at Mom's funeral!

CARA. I didn't leave you anywhere! The funeral hasn't happened yet!

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. Cara, do you know what time it is? *(Cara stares at her, then leaps out of bed, looking for her watch.)* It's one o'clock, Cara.

CARA. One o'clock? How can it be one o'clock? Oh, my God! I must have overslept! I was up with the boxes!

PENNY. What boxes?

CARA. The boxes...Mom's boxes...I was up all night looking for...Stanley asked me to...Stanley! Stanley! I asked him to wake me up! Stanley!!!

PENNY. Wait, what do you mean? You mean, you wanted to go?

CARA. What are you, dense? Of course I wanted to go! It was Mom!

PENNY. So, you didn't mean to leave me alone?

CARA. Oh, my God! Oh, my God! I can't believe I missed it! I can't believe he let me miss it! Oh, my God! *(Enter STANLEY. He looks exhausted.)* Are you fucking kidding me? Why the fuck wouldn't you wake me up for Mom's funeral?

STANLEY. Didn't you hear the phone this morning? It didn't stop ringing.

PENNY. Yeah, we tried calling you from the funeral home, too.

CARA. Do you see a phone in this room? Obviously, I didn't hear the phone! God, I told you last night, Stanley! I told you that the alarm on that clock isn't working and that I needed you to wake me up! Especially because I was going to be up finding all that shit for you for the funeral and the lawyers and shit in those boxes. Goddammit, Stanley! I specifically asked you to wake me up!

STANLEY. Hey, don't try pinning this on me! You're twenty three years old! You should be able to wake yourself up by now! You should have your own cell phone where we could call you! *(Cara rolls her eyes)* I was so busy this morning that Penny had to go with Georgia and her mother! Okay? So, don't try pinning this on me!

CARA. Wake me up for my mother's funeral, you fuck! How hard is that? My mother! It's not enough that I couldn't be here with the hospital and when she died?

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. Stop fighting.

STANLEY. Couldn't be here, Cara? Couldn't? You could have shown up more, you could have been here.

CARA. Fuck you! I was here every single time I could be!

STANLEY. I am tired of doing everything around here! /The hospital, the paperwork, the funeral arrangements, the hospital bills, contacting people, taking care of the two of you.

CARA. /The pity card? You're playing the pity card and now? You've got to be kidding me!

STANLEY. I don't know how Beth did everything...she...I'm so tired of doing everything for you. You're an adult, too, you know. You're supposed to be acting more responsibly than this!

CARA. Don't you fucking start! I am so sick of this lecture. What IS it with you? Every fucking time I see you! (*Mimics him.*) Responsibility. Responsibility. Why can't you be more responsible?

STANLEY. Well, let's think about the times I see you. (*Counts on fingers.*) When you show up to ask for money, when you've lost a job, when I'm helping you pack to get out of your boyfriend's apartment because he's stealing /from you...

CARA. /I didn't ask you to do that!

STANLEY. That's right. You didn't. But your mom did. Because she was so worried about you. You need to be more /responsible!

PENNY. /Stop /fighting!

CARA. /I'm responsible enough to take care of Penny now that Mom's gone. (*She looks at Penny. Smugly.*) And now you're even trying to take Penny away from me.

PENNY. What do you mean?

STANLEY. Cara, can't you keep your mouth shut?

CARA. I'm just being responsible.

PENNY. But Cara's supposed to have custody.

STANLEY. I was going to talk to you about it when we were all calmer. (*He glares at Cara.*) When it wasn't the day of the funeral.

PENNY. Mom said I should live with Cara.

STANLEY. Cara, I really wish you hadn't brought this up.

BECAUSE OF BETH

CARA. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I'm sorry. Is my timing bad?/ I'll really try work on that...

STANLEY. /Yes, Cara, your timing is bad. Everyone is on their way over here from the funeral.

CARA. People are coming here right now?

STANLEY. Yes. (*Cara grabs clothing and exits to the bathroom to get dressed.*)

PENNY. If something's going on with my custody, I want to know about it. Why would you think that you would get custody?

STANLEY. This is not a good discussion to have now. There are people coming/ and...

PENNY. /I'm not a baby! I'm fifteen years old! Wasn't anybody going to talk to me about this? People keep talking like I'm not here! Why am I always the last one to find things out? I hate it!

STANLEY. Penny, you and I will talk about this another time. I'm really tired and....It's been a very long day...Can't we just talk about this tomorrow?

CARA. (*OS*) Be careful what you ask for, Penny. Apparently, Stanley knows everything!

STANLEY. All right, Cara. Is this it? You're just going to hate me for the rest of your life? Is that it? Just find new ways to be angry at me? Is that how you want things? Because it's not how I want things.

CARA. (*OS*) I don't care how you want things anymore, Stanley.

STANLEY. It wasn't supposed to be this way. I didn't mean for it to happen this way.../I just...

CARA. (*Re-entering.*) /Well, what did you think was going to happen? Did it occur to you that my not being at Mom's funeral would fuck Penny up, too? That she'd come in here, screaming at me about how I abandoned her?

STANLEY. No. I don't know. I wasn't thinking...I just...I wasn't thinking clearly. (*Beat. Cara starts working on hair and make-up.*) I'm so tired.

CARA. Whatever, Stanley. I bet you got to go to your mother's funeral.

BECAUSE OF BETH

STANLEY. Cara, enough, okay? Enough! You're not the only one here who is sad or angry! And you want the truth? It wouldn't have been good for you to go to the funeral, anyway!

CARA. *(Throws down her brush and confronts him.)* You motherfucking son-of-a-bitch! How the hell do you know what's good for me? You're not my mother! You're not even a blood relative! You're just the last asshole my mother was with before she died. And it just happened to be you. So don't think you're special or anything. You got it, Stanley?

STANLEY. *(Very quietly.)* You know that's not all I am.

CARA. That's all you are to me. Some guy my mother fucked.

STANLEY. That's not who I am. I was her fiancé! I was at your graduation from college! I've been living here... How could you even...? And I remember...when I told you that I was going to propose to your mother...I remember what you /said...

CARA. *(Returns to her hair.)* /I'm not playing some fucking sentimental game with you, /Stanley.

STANLEY. /You said I was the nicest boyfriend she ever had! You said it! Now, look, there were plenty of guys there today who were just some guy your mother fucked. That's just not who I am!

CARA. *(Stops what she's doing. Long beat. She turns to Penny.)* What does he mean? Who was there?

PENNY. I don't know. Lots of people.

CARA. Who?

PENNY. Niko... *(Cara makes a face.)*...Victor...

CARA. What hole did he crawl out of?

PENNY....Luiz...

CARA. Mom could have had better taste in men.

PENNY....and Dad.

CARA. *(Long beat.)* What?

PENNY. Dad. He was there.

STANLEY. You see, I told you it wouldn't have been good for you.

CARA. You shut the fuck up. You don't know what's good for me, so just shut the fuck up! *(To Penny.)* How did he know?

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. I don't know. I guess someone called him.

CARA. Called him where?

PENNY. I don't know.

CARA. You didn't talk to him, did you?

PENNY. No. He... *(Beat.)* He didn't recognize me.

CARA. Well, we always had Mom's brains, not his. I can't believe he actually went to the funeral.

PENNY. Well, he didn't really.

CARA. What do you mean?

PENNY. He was hanging out outside the funeral home but he never went inside. I saw him when I went out to the car.

CARA. And he didn't recognize you.

PENNY. No.

CARA. *(To Stanley.)* Did you see him?

PENNY. Stanley wouldn't know what he looks like. He only knows him from pictures.

CARA. So do you.

PENNY. I knew him when I was a baby. And I've seen that picture of him that Mom used to keep in her room.

CARA. God, what the hell is he showing up for NOW?

PENNY. I don't know. *(Beat. Very suddenly.)* Do you think he has a big house?

CARA. Who cares?

PENNY. I was just wondering. It would be nice to have a house, don't you think?

CARA. I can't believe he showed up. *(Doorbell rings. There is silence. Nobody moves.)*

STANLEY. Penny, would you get the door?

PENNY. Why me?

STANLEY. Just do it, Penny!

PENNY. I have to do everything! *(Penny exits.)*

CARA. I can't believe my father showed up.

BECAUSE OF BETH

STANLEY. Yeah, well, look, he could be here for anything. Money, custody, anything. So you should really go with me to the lawyers' tomorrow morning and make sure everything is safe.

CARA. Don't talk to me, okay?

STANLEY. Look, I've barely slept in three days... I'm trying hard. I'm really serious about your dad being here. Don't you understand? This is to protect Penny's custody.

CARA. Well, Stanley, I have custody of Penny, so he's not getting her. *(Glares at Stanley.)* And neither is anyone else. *(Cara exits. Stanley looks down, frustrated. He collapses on the bed in tears, rocking back and forth.)*

SCENE 2

The living room. A table is laden with fruit baskets and food. A photograph of a middle-aged woman is on the table as well as several photo albums. There is a door leading to Penny's room, another for the front door and an exit to the hallway for the rest of the bedrooms. Cara is cleaning up the dishes. Penny is on the phone on the couch.

PENNY. I don't know. It's weird. Yeah, Cara and Stanley say I have to go. Why? Was the test hard? I'll figure it out. I don't know, Georgia, I said I'd figure it out! Yeah. No, I'm sorry. I just...yeah. Thanks for going with me today. I know...it's just...well, thank your mom for me. Yeah, okay. G'night. *(She hangs up the phone.)*

CARA. Why were you yelling at Georgia?

PENNY. I wasn't yelling. Mind your own business. God, if that phone rings one more time, I think I'll die, too.

CARA. Penny, don't say things like that. *(Beat.)* I didn't know that Ginny and Ted had come in.

PENNY. I don't even remember them. Who are they again?

BECAUSE OF BETH

CARA. Mom's first cousin's kids. There's a picture of them in one of these albums. *(Cara opens an album. She points to a picture.)* See? That was taken at Ginny's wedding.

PENNY. Who's that kid in the picture?

CARA. That's me.

PENNY. I never got to go to anyone's wedding. I don't remember any of these people. How come I don't remember them?

CARA. A lot of them are distant family that we didn't really see after we moved here. *(She points to a picture.)* That's Grandma and her sister, Elizabeth. That's who Mom was named after. Elizabeth died in a car accident when she was a teenager.

PENNY. I didn't know that. I mean, I knew Grandma had a sister but she didn't talk about her much. That's really sad. I can't imagine losing your sister like that. They look a lot alike. It's kinda creepy. I don't remember much about Grandma. I wish we hadn't moved away from her.

CARA. Well, you know we had to move when we did.

PENNY. Yeah. *(Beat.)* Do I have to go home with you when you go?

CARA. Well, I'm not letting Stanley get custody of you and Mom wants you to stay with me. *(She starts putting the albums away.)*

PENNY. But I don't know anybody in Arlington! What about my friends here?

CARA. Well, they'll come visit. You guys can have sleepovers and stay up all night, stuff your faces with hot chocolate and marshmallows, and watch scary movies.

PENNY. I don't do that.

CARA. Do what?

PENNY. Everything you just said; watch scary movies and have hot chocolate with marshmallows.

CARA. Really? Why not?

PENNY. I don't like scary movies.

CARA. Well, whatever you watch. I'm just saying, they'll come visit.

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. Yeah, sure. It's two whole hours away. And Arlington's so boring. It's just all people that do government jobs. Nobody's going to want to come visit.

CARA. Your friends will visit. They'll think it's cool to go somewhere else to see you. Besides, they'll be getting licenses soon. They'll want to drive places, right?

PENNY. They won't want to drive there. They'll think it sucks that I'm not at school with them. And they'll think Arlington is boring. There's nothing to do. And you need a car to drive everywhere. You think it's cool because you have a car and all of your friends from college are there and whatever. But me? What am I going to do until I get my driver's license and a car? I'm never going to have a life, Cara!

CARA. All right, Penny, first of all, there's plenty of busses to get around. In fact, it's probably easier to get around there than it is here. You're just used to Chestertown.

PENNY. It is easy to get around here. I have my bike.

CARA. Okay, so you'll have your bike. Did you think you were going to leave it here?

PENNY. It's not like there's anywhere to bike to in Arlington.

CARA. Yes, there is! There's plenty of strip malls where you can go hang out and shop and go to the movies.

PENNY. Is that what you think I do?

CARA. That's what I did.

PENNY. Yeah, but you also went to college and almost dropped out, like, three times and went to live that drummer guy...

CARA. Hey, you liked Brett!

PENNY. He had a nose ring!

CARA. So?

PENNY. So, that's gross!

CARA. Well, whatever, I'm not living with Brett anymore and I have a job so you don't have to worry about nose rings, okay?

PENNY. For now.

CARA. All right, fine, you want to be a brat? You just sit at home for the rest of your life and sulk. Waste away. What do I care?

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. You don't care.

CARA. Yeah, I'm a big old fat meanie and I don't care.

PENNY. You don't. *(Beat.)* Do I, at least, get my own room?

CARA. No. We're going to have to share for a while.

PENNY. Aw, man! So does that mean I have to hear you having sex?

CARA. Penny!

PENNY. What? It's not like I don't know about sex.

CARA. I am not talking about this with you.

PENNY. Mom talks to me about sex.

CARA. Well, I'm not Mom.

PENNY. You're not kidding. *(Beat.)* I don't eat that vegetarian stuff you eat, you know. I need meat.

CARA. Penny, would you just shut up?

PENNY. Where do I have to go to school?

CARA. Oh, my God! I said stop it! I don't want to talk about it!

PENNY. *(Picks up picture of woman.)* It feels weird to have Mom gone.

CARA. *(Uncomfortable.)* Yeah. I know.

PENNY. I miss her.

CARA. I know. At least you got to say goodbye to her.

PENNY. Yeah. I'm really sorry you missed the funeral. *(Beat.)* Mom always says...said...it was good to talk about things when you're upset. *(Beat.)* I saw Mom in the coffin. She looked...waxy. Like in that museum.

CARA. *(Suddenly.)* I'm going out.

PENNY. But it's eleven o'clock.

CARA. You're not my mom. *(Penny sticks her tongue out.)* I just need to get some air. *(She gets her coat, starts for the door and then purposefully turns around.)* Do the dishes before you go to bed, okay?

PENNY. Can't we leave them till morning?

CARA. No. Mom says this apartment has mice.

PENNY. We haven't had mice in three years!

CARA. Do the dishes.

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. (*Mimicking Cara.*) You're not my mom. (*Cara looks at her sternly.*) Fine. (*Cara exits.*) Stupid dishes. (*She starts clearing dishes. Stanley enters in sweats, looking ruffled and exhausted.*)

STANLEY. Where's Cara?

PENNY. She just went out. What are you doing up?

STANLEY. I thought I heard the door slam.

PENNY. Yeah. It was just Cara. You can go back to sleep.

STANLEY. No, I can't. I haven't been able to. It's just... I never thought it was going to be like this. All those months...I mean, we knew. It's not like everybody else...they don't know. But we knew. And then when it happens, it's just...it's not like I expected at all. We weren't ready. Things weren't done. She didn't finish. (*He is completely unaware of Penny at this point.*) She wasn't ready to go.

PENNY. I think she was ready to go.

STANLEY. What?

PENNY. Mom. I think she was ready to go. If she wasn't ready, she wouldn't have gone. That's what the priest said.

STANLEY. Right. You're really growing up, Penny.

PENNY. Yeah. Where've you been?

STANLEY. It's just sort of startling. I mean, one minute you're this cute little kid who's running around and playing hide-and-seek with me, and the next minute you're helping me at the hospital and with your mom's death. It's just...it's a big change.

PENNY. You make it sound like it happened overnight. We haven't played hide-and-seek in years. I mean, I play hide-and-seek with the kids I baby-sit for now.

STANLEY. I know. I guess all of this is just making me nostalgic. Both of you have grown up so much. Cara never used to wash the dishes when she was your age.

PENNY. I know.

STANLEY. She's so angry with me.

PENNY. Can you blame her?

STANLEY. No. It was stupid. I don't know what I was thinking. It's just that...she's just so angry. I don't want to spend this time

BECAUSE OF BETH

fighting with her. Or you. Or anyone, for that matter. But especially you two. I mean, we're all we've got now. We shouldn't be fighting. I hate this.

PENNY. Yeah, well, so do I.

STANLEY. Isn't tomorrow trash day?

PENNY. Yes.

STANLEY. Would you take the trash out when you're done with the dishes?

PENNY. Why don't you take it out? You're the one who can't sleep. Why don't you be useful?

STANLEY. Sorry. I'm just really tired. And I'm worried about this lawyers' meeting tomorrow morning...It's nothing. Never mind. I'll take the trash out. *(He starts tying it up. The doorbell rings.)* God, it's late. Who's coming by now to pay their condolences?

PENNY. Chill out. Cara probably just forgot her keys. Besides, you're up. What do you care if more mourners come by?

STANLEY. I'd like to be sleeping.

PENNY. *(Opens the door. ROBERT stands in the doorway.)*
Oh, my God!

ROBERT. I'm sorry...I was looking for Stanley Martin. Does he still live here?

STANLEY. Who is it? *(He sees who it is and drops the trash.)*

ROBERT. Stanley! *(He throws his arms around Stanley.)* I thought it was you today.

STANLEY. Robert. Oh, my God. *(He looks quickly at Penny and then back.)* What are you doing here?

ROBERT. Beth. Her funeral. I came for her funeral. I... *(He looks at Penny and back at Stanley.)* I saw you there and I...I really wanted to say hi...I wanted to talk to you...her death has been so hard for me...but when I turned around, you were gone. I had no idea where you lived or anything so I eventually called information. The phone was busy all night so I just decided to come over.

STANLEY. This isn't a good time.

BECAUSE OF BETH

ROBERT. Stanley, I really need your help.

PENNY. Do you want some fruit?

ROBERT. What?

PENNY. Fruit. We have lots of fruit. (*Stanley quickly turns over the photograph on the coffee table.*) Do you want some?

ROBERT. Oh, no...no. (*To Penny.*) Was it your birthday? It looks like you had a party.

PENNY. No...

ROBERT. I'm Robert. You must be Stanley's daughter. (*He offers his hand.*)

PENNY. /No...

STANLEY. /She's my friend's daughter.

ROBERT. Oh. A special friend?

STANLEY. (*To Penny.*) Why don't you go and get some sleep?

PENNY. I don't want to.

ROBERT. Really. We need to talk about some things.

PENNY. Where do you live?

ROBERT. Look, I'd really like to talk to Stanley.

PENNY. Well, you might as well talk to him with me here because he's just going to tell me later. We talk about everything. So you might as well tell me. Where do you live?

ROBERT. Chicago. Who the hell is this?

STANLEY. Maybe we should talk tomorrow.

PENNY. What do you do in Chicago?

ROBERT. Look, I came to find Stanley because I'm very upset about something. Do you understand that?

PENNY. Do you have kids?

ROBERT. Yes! Yes! I have kids! All right? (*Stanley looks surprised. Robert notices.*) Three. I have three kids. (*To Penny.*) What are you, the Inquisitor?

PENNY. Three kids! So I guess you're married, huh?

ROBERT. I guess so.

STANLEY. Why don't we have breakfast tomorrow?

PENNY. I like kids. I baby-sit a lot. How old are your kids?

ROBERT. Breakfast tomorrow is fine. What time?

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. If I came to Chicago, I could baby-sit for your kids, couldn't I?

ROBERT. Yeah, sure.

STANLEY. I have an appointment at eight tomorrow morning. But maybe we can have breakfast before I go to work. Say, maybe nine? There's a great little diner right under my office called Tiny's. It's on the corner of Garrett and Young Streets. How does that sound?

PENNY. But you guys didn't even catch up! I mean, it seems like you haven't seen each other in a really, really long time. I mean, aren't you curious what you guys have been doing?

STANLEY. That's enough!

ROBERT. Well, it's true...I did just sort of barge in and...I haven't even heard what you're up to, Stanley... (*Stanley glares at Penny who looks pleased. Uncomfortably.*) What...what do you do now? I think you were working on some master's in science or something...?

STANLEY. Political science.

ROBERT. So I guess you finished that, huh?

STANLEY. Yes, I did. But I'm in real estate now. But, look, we'll...we'll talk about it all tomorrow morning at breakfast.

ROBERT. Yeah, yeah, right. Oh, this is the number that I'm staying at. (*He searches his pockets.*) I know it's really sudden, me showing up like this. I didn't know who else to turn to, you know. And, even though we haven't been in touch since college, I figured you'd understand...you know, about Beth and all...

PENNY. Beth...the lady whose funeral we went to today? (*Robert nods.*) Why would he understand?

ROBERT. Well, Stanley was my best friend when I was dating her in college. (*He finds the paper.*) Ah! Here it is.

PENNY. Best friends, really? Like you hung out all the time? What was Stanley like in college?

ROBERT. You ask a lot of questions, you know that?

PENNY. I'm inquisitive. So, what was he like?

BECAUSE OF BETH

ROBERT. *(Handing the number to Stanley.)* Ummmm, he was...a ladies' man.

PENNY. Really?

STANLEY. I was not.

ROBERT. Sure you were. All the girls wanted to be with you.

PENNY. Hard to imagine.

ROBERT. Well, except Beth, of course. She was my girlfriend.

STANLEY. /I'll see you tomorrow, Robert.

PENNY. / Wow. College girlfriend. When was the last time you saw her?

ROBERT. Why do you ask so many questions?

STANLEY. I think we all need to get some sleep. I'll see you tomorrow, Robert.

PENNY. It just seems like a long way to fly from Chicago for a funeral, don't you think?

ROBERT. *(Suddenly uncomfortable.)* I was planning to be in town on business anyway.

PENNY. What do you do again?

STANLEY. Stop it! *(To Robert.)* I'll see you at Tiny's tomorrow, Robert.

ROBERT. Nine thirty, right?

STANLEY. No, nine o'clock. I have to be at work at nine thirty.

ROBERT. Right, right. Nine o'clock. Sounds good. You have my number in case there are any changes. *(He moves towards the door.)*

PENNY. *(Jumping in front of him and sticking out her hand.)*

Very interesting to meet you. *(Robert shakes her hand and exits. Penny whirls around to face Stanley, triumphantly.)* So. You know my father?

BECAUSE OF BETH

SCENE 3

Graveyard. There is a fresh grave without a headstone. Same night. Cara enters, carrying a six pack of beer. She sits down next to the fresh grave, takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights one.

CARA. I'm really sorry, Mom. *(Long beat.)* I know I should have been there. I had so many chances to say goodbye to you and you kept telling me...say goodbye now, you never know...and I didn't want to. Well, so, are you happy? You were right. You were fucking right. All that time and I never said goodbye to you. *(She opens a beer.)* And let's get something clear: I'm not saying goodbye to you now. That's not why I'm here. I came to talk to you. Just talk. You and me. So let's talk... I always wanted you to listen to me...now that I have your attention, I don't know what to... Aaaaauuuuuughhhh! This fucking sucks! I can't believe how much this sucks! You're not supposed to be gone yet, Mom! This whole fucking mess sucks! Penny? She's so fucking whiny! It's like she has no other way to relate to me except to sob on me. And who do I have? No one! My friends aren't here. *(Beat.)* None of those people today cared about you, Mom. I did. I cared about you. *(Beat.)* It's worse than when Dad left because at least then I had you. Now I don't have anyone. Oh, and what's with him showing up at the funeral? I mean, what the fuck is that, Mom? Since when does Dad even have a clue what the hell is going on in our lives? Do you think maybe you could tell me that? It's sick, you know. It's like I only get to have one parent surfacing at a time. Well, luckily, he's gone again. What a bastard! This is so fucking unreal. You have to come home! You have to! You didn't even wait for me to show up so I could say goodbye to you! It wasn't my fault! I couldn't get here any faster! Couldn't you have waited just another fifteen minutes? And now Stanley wants to take Penny, the only family that I have left. It's not going to happen. Penny's my sister, not his daughter. Stanley wants me to go with him to the lawyers' tomorrow. He said he thinks Dad's going to try to take Penny.

BECAUSE OF BETH

(Nervously.) Dad can't do that, can he? He hasn't been here in forever. He can't just come and take custody, right? *(Beat.)* He won't. He won't get custody. I'll go to the lawyers' and make sure. I'll have to be in the grave next to you for him to get custody, Mom! *(Quietly.)* I'm the only one left who actually knows, who remembers everything about you... I do. Even Penny doesn't. I remember the night Dad left. No one else knows about that. Remember how you came into my room, and you were crying...and you couldn't tell me what was wrong, but you just crawled into my bed and asked me to give you huggies to make Mommy better. And I did. I gave you huggies. But it didn't get better. And I started crying and we fell asleep crying. *(Long beat as she chokes back tears.)* Mommy, I need huggies to make it better. I need huggies. Make it better. *(She starts sobbing and shaking. Rocks herself in her sobs.)*

SCENE 4

A coffee shop. The customers are primarily businesspeople who work nearby. Enter Penny. She is dressed up but has a scarf over her head and big sunglasses. She looks around quickly. The WAITRESS enters.

WAITRESS. Who are you supposed to be? Marilyn Monroe?

PENNY. Can I just have a table for one? *(The Waitress takes her to a table CS.)* Could I possibly get one over there? *(Penny points to another table to the side.)* I get cold really easily. *(The Waitress leads her to another table. Penny sits down with her back to the door and opens her menu.)*

WAITRESS. We have a few specials today. We /have...

PENNY. /That's okay. I don't need to hear the specials. *(Waitress walks away. Enter Robert.)*

ROBERT. Table for two please. *(The Waitress takes two menus and leads him to the CS table. Robert takes off his coat and sits.)*

BECAUSE OF BETH

WAITRESS. Would you like to hear the specials now or would you like to wait?

ROBERT. *(Nervously looking at the door.)* The specials...the specials now are fine.

WAITRESS. Today we have a special omelet with salmon and capers. The salmon was just caught yesterday. And we have pancakes with peaches. Can I get you something to drink to start?

ROBERT. No. I'm fine. I'll just wait for my friend. *(Waitress exits. Penny sees Robert reading his menu and starts to get up but sees Stanley entering hurriedly. Penny sits down again with her menu open. Neither man notices her.)*

STANLEY. Sorry I'm late. My meeting took longer than I thought.

ROBERT. No, that's fine. I just got here myself. I really appreciate this, Stanley. It's been so hard...

STANLEY. Really? Has it? Because you haven't been around at all, Robert. How could it possibly be hard for you?

ROBERT. You remember how much I loved Beth. We were very close. Even after we broke up.

STANLEY. No, you weren't. And it was called a divorce not a break-up. Are you expecting some pay out from her estate or something?

ROBERT. I need to find her lawyer, Stanley. *(Waitress comes to the table.)*

WAITRESS. Good morning, gentlemen. Are you ready to order?

ROBERT. Yes. Yes...I forget what I wanted...I'm so sorry. *(he looks at the menu again.)* Cheese omelet and black coffee. Side of grits.

WAITRESS. And for you? Sir?

ROBERT. Stanley, are you going to order something?

STANLEY. Coffee. Coffee with milk.

WAITRESS. Okay, I'll be right back with your order. *(She takes the menus and exits.)*

STANLEY. Why?

ROBERT. Why what?

BECAUSE OF BETH

STANLEY. Why do you need to find Beth's lawyers?

ROBERT. She kept calling me right before she died. I never called her back...I just...I didn't know that she was sick. But, now...I think she must have been calling to tell me that I'm in her will.

STANLEY. You think Beth left you something?

ROBERT. She was my ex-wife! You don't have to make it sound so unbelievable.

STANLEY. I'm just...I'm just thinking that...well, hasn't it been a long time since you've seen her?

ROBERT. So? Hasn't it been a long time since you last saw her, too?

STANLEY. *(Beat.)* We spent a lot of time together in the past few years.

ROBERT. So, you saw each other for coffee every once in a while or you hung out regularly?

STANLEY. Why does that matter?

ROBERT. It doesn't. *(Beat.)* What was she like?

STANLEY. What?

ROBERT. How did things turn out for her?

STANLEY. Robert, I can't do this.

ROBERT. Do what?

STANLEY. I don't want to sit here and assure you that everything was great for Beth so you can go on with your life. I think you already feel guilty about whatever happened with the two of you. I don't think that has anything to do with me.

ROBERT. Okay, okay. Fine. But will you help me find her lawyers? You're the only person who I can trust about this. I can't do this alone.

STANLEY. Why me?

ROBERT. We were best friends. *(Tries to smile but it fades and he looks down.)* Things are bad, Stanley. My wife and I are just barely making it through. I mean, we've got kids. *(Beat.)* Three! Three kids! And Lizzie has to go to some special school next year...My boss told me that they might make a bunch of cuts at

BECAUSE OF BETH

Christmas if we don't reach our quota. I could be cut! I could lose my job! What am I going to do? I don't have the money to support them.

STANLEY. Don't you have any savings? *(Stanley's cell phone rings.)* Excuse me. *(He answers the phone.)* Hello? But I gave them copies of... *(He looks up at Robert.)* Okay, hold on. Hold on. Let me go outside where I can get better signal. *(To Robert.)* Excuse me for a moment. *(He gets up and exits. Penny checks that Stanley is gone and then takes off her scarf and sunglasses. She approaches Robert.)*

PENNY. Fancy meeting you here!

ROBERT. What...what are you doing here?!

PENNY. I was hungry. *(Enter Waitress with food.)*

WAITRESS. One omelet and black coffee. And one coffee with milk. *(Looking at Penny, confused.)* Can I get you something?

PENNY. I'd like the French toast with cherry jam and a hot chocolate. *(She seats herself at the table. Waitress exits.)*

ROBERT. What are you doing?

PENNY. Actually, I'm kind of glad that I ran into you again.

ROBERT. Look, I'm having breakfast with someone.

PENNY. Don't worry, I'll move when he comes back. Have you ever been to any classical concerts in Chicago?

ROBERT. Do you think maybe I could have my table back?

PENNY. Well, have you?

ROBERT. Have I what?

PENNY. Been to any classical concerts in Chicago?

ROBERT. I'm not really into the whole music scene.

PENNY. That's too bad. See, I play the violin and I was thinking about moving to Chicago when I grow up because there are a lot of great symphonies and orchestras out there. I'm really good. I got an award last year from the state. What are the neighborhoods like there?

ROBERT. The neighborhoods?

PENNY. Yeah. I have family out there. So, I'm thinking about the neighborhoods. Like where you live. What's that like?

BECAUSE OF BETH

ROBERT. I don't know. *(He turns around.)* Where did he go?

PENNY. Where did who go?

ROBERT. I told you! I'm having breakfast with someone.

PENNY. Oh, right, with Stanley, right? Did he go to the bathroom?

ROBERT. No, he got a phone call.

PENNY. Oh, I don't know. So, tell me more about what Stanley was like in college.

ROBERT. Look, who are you? What do you want?

PENNY. I just wanted to get to know you better. *(Enter Stanley. He watches, unnoticed.)*

ROBERT. That's very nice but I'm going through a very hard time. I'm very upset. I'm having breakfast with someone /and...

PENNY. /With Stanley.

ROBERT. Yes. Stanley. I don't know who you are. You've just sat down and started asking me all of these questions. Now, just leave me alone. Go back to your table.

PENNY. No.

ROBERT. What?

PENNY. No! I'm not going to leave. Leaving is not the answer to everything. Sometimes staying and working through things is the answer. My mom taught me that. Wouldn't you teach your kids that?

ROBERT. My kids aren't old enough to be taught things like that.

PENNY. Some of us are.

ROBERT. But you're not... *(Realizing what she is saying, Robert stands up and starts backing away. Penny stands, too. Robert takes a step closer to her. Very quietly, almost a whisper.)* Cara?

PENNY. No. I'm Penny.

ROBERT. *(Still whispering, slightly terrified.)* Penelope?

PENNY. Not many people know that that's my full name. *(Robert grabs his coat.)* Wait, wait...

ROBERT. You don't have any relatives in Chicago!

PENNY. Yes, I do! You!

BECAUSE OF BETH

ROBERT. I already have children at home. I don't need any more kids. (*He starts for the door. Stanley blocks him. Robert looks from Stanley to Penny and back.*) You knew that Beth and I had children!

STANLEY. Yes.

ROBERT. I have to go. Don't worry about helping me, Stanley. I'll do it on my own.

PENNY. Why did come to Mom's funeral if you didn't want anything to do with us?

STANLEY. Go on. Tell her.

ROBERT. I'm not explaining myself to some teenager. And you keep out of it, Stanley! You have nothing to do with this.

PENNY. Actually, Robert, he does. (*Stanley shakes his head at Penny.*) He was engaged to Mom.

ROBERT. You were what?! (*Enter Waitress.*)

WAITRESS. Okay, one French toast with cherry jam and a hot chocolate. (*Waitress exits.*)

ROBERT. You were engaged to her?

STANLEY. Yes.

ROBERT. You are unbelievable!

STANLEY. It's not like she was your wife anymore, Robert. You left her a long time ago.

ROBERT. You always wanted her, Stanley. Because she was the only one you couldn't have.

STANLEY. It doesn't matter how we ended up together. Why should you care so much? It's not like you ever showed up for family holidays or anything.

ROBERT. But...if you were her fiancé...You know who the lawyers are. And you know when the will reading is.

STANLEY. Forget it, Robert. I'm not helping you. And Penny's custody is all settled.

PENNY. Wait a minute, I don't want to live with Cara! And I don't want to live with you! I want to live in Chicago with him!

STANLEY. Penny...

BECAUSE OF BETH

PENNY. Come on...Dad, you don't want me living with Stanley, do you?

STANLEY. Penny, it's not that simple.

PENNY. It IS that simple. I want to live with my father. It is that simple. *(To Robert.)* And you don't want him to be my dad, right?

ROBERT. Right. I don't want him to be your dad.

PENNY. See?

ROBERT. And I don't want to be your dad either.

STANLEY. *(Beat.)* Robert, you don't say things like that to her! You just don't say things like that! Don't you have any sensitivity at all?

ROBERT. Oh, come on! She's been going on and on about moving to Chicago to live with her family ever since she walked in. I'm not her family.

STANLEY. You are her family and you don't say that to a fifteen year old girl! She's fifteen!

PENNY. Don't talk about me as though I'm not here. I hate you. I hate you both! *(Enter Cara, carrying a stack of folders. To Robert.)* How can you stand there and say that you're not my family?

CARA. *(To Robert.)* You fucking ass.

SCENE 5

The livingroom. Penny enters from front door, crying, and exits to her bedroom. She slams the door. Cara enters from front door and Stanley follows.

CARA. Penny! *(She knocks on Penny's door.)* Penny, let me in!

PENNY. *(OS)* Go away! I hate you!

CARA. Penny, I know you don't hate me! Open up!

PENNY. *(Opens the door.)* Did that feel good to you, yelling at him the way you did in the middle of the restaurant? Did it? All those years of hating him? I hope it did! Because now he's never

BECAUSE OF BETH

coming back! You made him go away! And now I'm never going to get to live with him!

CARA. Live with him? Is that what you thought? (*Penny slams the door.*) He's an asshole, Penny!! You should feel lucky that I saw Stanley through the window and came in when I did! God, he just couldn't fucking leave well enough alone

PENNY. (*OS*) Cara, you were angry at him before you even showed up!

CARA. So?! Look, Penny, Dad isn't... I know you wanted Dad to be this superhero who was going to come back and be wonderful... but... He just isn't that person. (*Beat.*) I wish he was. I wish that he was the dad that showed up for our birthdays or for your violin concerts or my softball games. I wish... I wish that Dad acted like a dad. And that he didn't... But he's not that guy. He was done with us long ago, Penny! He just left us! Don't you remember? He made that choice! He actually decided to leave us and not look back! (*More to herself than anyone else.*) I didn't know dads could do that. I didn't know they could just stop caring. (*Penny opens the door.*) And now I wish we had a mom, too. (*Beat.*) Penny, what were you even doing at that coffee shop? You were supposed to be at school. (*Penny slams the door.*) Penny!

STANLEY. Robert showed up here last night asking me for help.

CARA. You? You don't even know him.

STANLEY. We went to college together.

CARA. What?!

STANLEY. Your mom and I...we went to college together with your dad. That's how we really met. Your dad was a good friend of mine...my best friend.

CARA. You've been lying to us? (*Accusingly.*) So, you were the one who told him about the funeral!

STANLEY. Me? What, are you kidding? No, absolutely not. We used to be best friends. We're not anymore. (*Beat.*) But I did know he was going to be there.

CARA. (*Starting to bang on Penny's door.*) Penny!!

STANLEY. But I didn't tell him, I swear!

BECAUSE OF BETH

CARA. You're a fucking lying son-of-a bitch!

STANLEY. Cara. It's true that I deliberately didn't wake you up for the funeral.

CARA. You fucking asshole.

STANLEY. I know. I know. I don't know what I was thinking. But I panicked. I knew your dad would be there and I know how/you feel...

CARA. /Stop talking! Stop talking! Stop it! Stop it! You! You don't know anything! Do you hear me? Nothing! You don't know! You have no fucking idea how I feel! You....! Get away from me! (*Banging on Penny's door.*) Penny! Penny! (*Stanley reaches out to console her.*) Don't touch me! (*Enter Penny from her room.*) Penny...Penny, Stanley knew. He knew...that's why.

PENNY. I heard. I'm going out. (*She pulls a full backpack and her violin case out of her room.*)

CARA. Where? Where are you going?

PENNY. I don't have to tell you. (*To Stanley.*) And I don't have to tell you either.

STANLEY. Full backpack for just going out, don't you think?

PENNY. I have a lot to do.

STANLEY. And your violin?

PENNY. I might want to practice.

STANLEY. Didn't you just tell your father that running away wasn't the answer?

PENNY. I am not running away! I am going out! God, doesn't anyone listen to me around here?

STANLEY. Fine, but be back by dinner.

PENNY. My curfew isn't until ten.

STANLEY. I said dinner. The will reading is tomorrow morning at nine and all of us need to be there. I don't want to be responsible for waking anyone up. (*Looks at Cara.*) Again.

PENNY. Don't worry, Stanley. You're so sick of being responsible for me? I'll be responsible for myself, okay? (*She starts for the door.*)

BECAUSE OF BETH

CARA. Penny, come on. Be mad at Stanley. Fine. You should be. He's done enough. And be mad at me, too, if you want to be. But at least talk to me.

PENNY. Now. Now you want me to talk to you. You didn't want me to talk to you when I was having my nightmares. You didn't want me to call you and interrupt your important life to tell you how Mom was doing with her treatments. But now you want me to talk to you? *(With courage.)* Fuck you, Cara!

STANLEY. Penny!

PENNY. You've been fighting with me and Stanley ever since you got here! And now you seem to be under the delusion that you've saved me from my big bad daddy. Do you even have a clue? I have no family! Mom's gone, you left and now I don't even have Dad! Stanley's not even family! And I have to break up my whole life to go live in some ridiculous place and pretend that you and I have a relationship! Well, we don't, Cara! So, don't think I'm gonna talk to you now! *(She exits through the front door. Stunned silence. Stanley starts to exit to the hall.)*

CARA. She didn't mean that, Stanley. You know she didn't. She's just angry.

STANLEY. *(Turns around. Quietly.)* She meant most of it, Cara. Even if she is angry. *(Stanley exits.)*

SCENE 6

The graveyard. Later that afternoon. Penny enters with her bike, backpack and violin case. She puts her bike and violin case down and goes to the grave. She looks at it a moment, then leans down, picks up a handful of dirt and throws it at the grave angrily.

PENNY. Well, Mom, it looks like we have a few things to talk about! I don't know how things are in that nice coffin of yours, but out here, they kind of suck a lot! How could you give Cara custody of me? Don't you think you could have talked to me about it? I mean, it's about me, don't you think you could have asked what I

BECAUSE OF BETH

wanted? All anyone ever says is that I have to be older. Well, when do I get old enough for you to discuss these kinds of things with me? Is there some age limit like drinking and voting? Suddenly you can talk to me about what would happen to me if you died? I am always the last one to know about what happens to me! It's not fair! You make decisions! Cara makes decisions! Stanley makes decisions! And Stanley wants custody! Yeah, he wants custody! He's not my father. He just wants custody because I'm your daughter. *(Beat.)* You told me that you would always be there. You're not. Where are you now? Oh, and just so you know, no matter how many people tell me, I'm not going to believe that mumbo jumbo crap about you being with me all the time. It's not the same. Who am I going to talk to about Peter? You were the only one who knew about him. God, I'm never going to go out with Peter because I have to move to Arlington!! You are wrecking my life! Cara fights with Stanley all the time. Stanley's so out of it he can barely make it through the day. He didn't wake Cara up to go to your funeral because he knew Dad was going to be there. Oh, and keeping a few secrets about him, huh? *(She takes out something from her bag.)* You're really lucky that Cara didn't find this when we were going through the boxes. *(She opens a T-shirt that says "Proud dad of a George Mason grad".)* So what the hell is this? I know this wasn't for Stanley. Cara would have flipped out if you ever called Stanley her dad. So I'm thinking this was supposed to be for Dad. What the hell were you thinking, Mom? *(She shoves it in her bag.)* What's up with you lying about how you met Stanley? You and Dad and Stanley being friends in college? You know, we used to tell each other everything, Mom! Everything! Or at least I told you everything. All of my friends thought you were so cool because they could come and talk to you when they couldn't talk to their own moms! And you know what's so stupid? They still think that! Georgia calls me, crying and shit because you're gone and I'm finding out all this stuff about who you really were! You were my mom! When Dad left, it was you and me and Cara! And then when Cara left, it was just you and me!

BECAUSE OF BETH

It was always us. Even when Stanley moved in. You weren't supposed to keep secrets from me! You were still supposed to be my mom! Because of you, I spent my whole life thinking Dad was this awful person. Well, I met him, Mom! And you know what? He's not an awful person; he's just hard to get to know. I hate Cara! She sent him away! She doesn't understand that I never knew him. I never got the chance to make my own decision about whether or not to hate him. I had to get that decision from you and her, too. I'm tired of this. You were supposed to be different. But you were like every other mom who makes choices for their kids. You told me that you weren't like that but you were. And I never realized how much until you died. *(Long beat.)* I came here to tell you that I'm leaving. I don't care what you said about my custody and I don't care if you left me stuff. I'm going to Chicago or somewhere else where nobody can find me. I'm going to be a musician. I'm going to start making my own decisions. *(Long beat. She stomps away defiantly to her bike. Robert enters. They freeze at the sight of one another.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS--
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