

Jessica Pleyel

TITLE: FINDING BEULAH

CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

LITTLE LOLA: between 5-7

LOLA: Early twenties, artistic, quirky, smart.

ARMIN: Mid to late fifties, conservative, intense

LANI: Mid to late fifties, empathetic, maternal

DEX: Early twenties, hip, chill, deep

DEWEY: Mid thirties, quiet, understanding, sensitive

BEULAH: (Deceased, only here in memory) Mid forties, weepy, sensitive

GRAVEYARD ATTENDANT

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

HAMPTON: (Deceased, only here in memory) Mid forties, easy to anger, practical

COSETTE: 6-10, surreal, in a dream

BERTHA: Early sixties, lazy, jealous

AARON: Early sixties

CHARLIE: Late sixties

CHILD ARMIN: between 5-7

YOUNG ARMIN: between 17-20

SETTING: THE BAYOUS OF SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

LIGHTS UP On one half of the stage.

This side of the stage should be rather bare, with just a spotlight on LITTLE LOLA and ARMIN. Little Lola should have a small rabbit in her arms.

Little Lola is young, between the ages of 5 and 7. She is wearing very stereotypical girl's dress. Her hair is in pigtails with bows, and her dress is all pink, and full of ruffles.

Armin is a larger man. He wears large spectacles, and a camouflage button down shirt. His pants are dark denim. Around his neck is a small locket, which seems strangely out of place.

LITTLE LOLA

B-but daddy! I don't understand! Tinky is my best friend! She *can't* be dinner!

ARMIN

Lola! You're not understanding me.

Armin gets down on his knees, and looks Lola in her eyes. He tucks some of her hair behind her ear.

ARMIN (con't)

Look, sweetie... Tinky is not and has never been a pet. She is an animal we are going to eat. So she is going to have to die, but she is dying so you can eat!

LITTLE LOLA

(hugging the rabbit closer to her chest)

No, daddy NO! She is NOT food! (beat) We have other bunnies! Why can't we just eat those ones, and leave Tinky out of this!?

Little Lola begins to cry. Armin gets off of his knees, exasperated.

ARMIN

DAMN IT, LOLA! You need to grow up! You're a big girl now! This is where our food comes from! You have to understand that life isn't easy.

LITTLE LOLA

B-but daddy--!

ARMIN

(interrupting)

I don't care, Lola! Wake up! This is how life is. It isn't always happy rainbows and sunshine. You know what..? If you were a big girl, you would kill Tinky yourself.

LITTLE LOLA

W-what?!

ARMIN

You heard me, young lady. You want to be a big girl right?

LITTLE LOLA

Yeah daddy! I want to be a grown up but—

ARMIN

Well a grown up would be able to get her own food. This rabbit is not a pet, but our dinner, and if you were a big girl you would kill it yourself.

Little Lola is sobbing now, holding her rabbit closer and closer to her. She hugs the rabbit near her face.

Armin smacks Lola on the cheek. She stops crying, in shock.

ARMIN (con't)

Stop that blubbering, Lola! Do as I say! Stop being a foolish kid!

Little Lola, with her hands shaking, lifts the rabbit away from her, she holds it up, getting ready to kill it.

LIGHTS OUT

SOUND: A shrill screech of a rabbit, and crying of a little girl.

LIGHTS UP on opposite side of the stage.

This side of the stage is set up like an artist's studio. The space is messy, and disheveled, with canvases, and sculptures scattered. The wall behind is white, and has some splatters of paint on it.

LOLA is standing there, looking at the other side of the stage. She looks away quickly and rubs the side of her neck gingerly.

Lola is wearing drastically different clothing than her child self. She wears a black tee shirt with a brooch connecting to her one earring. She has on ripped jean shorts, with ripped black tights underneath. On her feet: beat up Doc Martins. Her hair is short and asymmetrical. Her make-up should also be dark.

LOLA

You saw that over there? That was the last day I think I ever really loved him—Armin, err I mean my dad. It was a peak moment in my life, that's true. I will never forget it. Something changed within Armin and I that day. He was right, I wasn't a little girl after that... and I certainly wasn't *his* little girl after that. It was as if when Tinky's fragile neck broke between my fingers, I broke. I can't even look at Armin anymore. And it doesn't help that he hates my art, my boyfriend, my lifestyle—(laughs dismissively) everything about me.

Lola looks down, obviously disheartened.

SOUND: A knock on a door, loud and impatient. Should sound as if it is coming from the other side of the stage.

Lola looks back up and to the sound

LOLA

Yeah come on in—it's unlocked!

LANI runs in like a hurricane. She is in a panic, and short of breath. Lani has curly red hair, and is wearing a brightly colored sweater with matching jewelry and spectacles. She should look like someone coming out of a children's cartoon.

LANI

LOLA! Darling! Sh-she's gone! GONE! Vanished! Absolutely disappeared into thin air!

LOLA

Mom! Mom! Calm down... Take a deep breath. Who? Who is gone?

LANI

Beulah! Your grandma! She's gone!

LOLA

(laughing slightly)

Surprise, surprise! She's been dead for over twenty-five years, mom! Come on, stop freakin' out! Have you been drinking too many strawberry margaritas again?

LANI

(defensively)

That's not funny! That was only one time... (beat) But seriously, Lola! Listen to me! Of course your grandmother's been dead for years... That's not what this is about. The thing is her body is missing—her *grave* is gone!

LOLA

Gone? How can a grave just up and disappear? That's ludicrous!

LANI

Believe me, I am just as confused as you are! No one knows what happened! Your father went down the other day to pay his respects—it being the 25th anniversary of her passing, but when he got there... She was gone.

Lani begins to tear up, and Lola softens as she holds her mother's shoulder.

LOLA

Come on, mom, don't cry. I am so sorry. What are you gonna do?

LANI

Well sweetie, that's where you come in. We need your help in finding her—finding Beulah. I need you to go with your dad and—

LOLA

No way! Not a chance! Sorry mom, but I can't do that.

LANI

Baby, I know you aren't on the best of terms with your father but he.... We need your help!

LOLA

Oh no, mom! It's not that we're not on good terms. We have NO terms. Nothing at all. Mom, you know I love you b-but I just can't do that. Why don't you ask Dewey? Lord knows he and Dewey get along way better than *Armin* and I.

LANI

Lola Nicolette Magnusson! You know how I hate it when you refer to your father by his first name! No matter how bad your relationship is—he is and always will be your FATHER!

LOLA

I know, I know... I'm sorry mom I didn't mean to disrespect you. I-I just don't think of him as my father anymore. He hasn't even spoken to me since I moved to my studio apartment with Dex. Besides, I am positive Dewey would love to help.

LANI

Well I would have your brother help, but there is another aspect to this problem that you aren't aware of, sweetie... and I think it's time you find out. Lola, on your twenty-fifth birthday, you will inherit all of your Grandma Beulah's savings.

LOLA

(surprised)

You mean my birthday this coming month? (beat) Come on, mom. Don't mess with me! Did Grandma Beulah even *have* a savings account? I always thought Armin—I mean dad's—family was completely impoverished.

LANI

That's what we all thought. This news came as a complete surprise to everyone at the reading of her will those many years ago. The fact that she chose you as her sole inheritor, just weeks before you were born was an even bigger shock. We had just decided on a name for you a couple of days earlier. (pause) I can even prove it to you.

Lani hands a document over to Lola to read. As Lola grabs the document she reads aloud.

LOLA

(reading)

My beloved children, I am so sad to have to say goodbye to you all...

This begins with Lola's voice and then we hear BEULAH's voice overlaying Lola's. We do not see Beulah, but only hear her voice.

BEULAH

...but you know I have been ill for many years. I thank God that I am now with your father in Heaven. It has been a hard long road without him. Oh my children, I must confess something to you all. I know our family struggled greatly, and never had enough money... but I was holding one thing to myself. As you all know, when I was a young girl, I lived on a small farm with my big family. We had a little over an acre, with thirteen kids to tend the crops, chickens and pigs. As the years flew by, and I had you all and your father to take care of, I hardly returned to the old farm where I grew up, and after my brothers and sisters all were dead and gone, I never wanted to go back— being haunted by their memories.

However, one day last year I received a call from a big oil company. They found oil on my little old homestead, and when I heard the amount of money I would be paid, I couldn't say no. So, my children, I am sure you are itching to know how much. It was ninety thousand dollars. I didn't tell you all because I was afraid to— afraid how it would change our family.

...That's why I am not giving it to any of you. You see, as we begin life, we are green as leaves on trees, fresh and new. As we age, we fall, fade and alter in ways that are not always beautiful. Sometimes, we even become rotten, and in time decompose into our darkest parts. I am not saying you are bad children or bad people, but I know how money changes people for the worse, and I have seen your faults throughout your lives. So, I am giving this to someone pure, someone I will never lay my eyes on.

Lola, my dear son Armin's baby girl, someday this money will be yours. You are responsible for my memory, and my money. But! You must love your family, and always take time to understand and appreciate those around you, never forgetting who you are and where you come from. For those green leaves on the trees are nothing without the branch, trunk and root from which they grow.

My children! I know these are not the words you want to hear, but I am doing what I feel I must. I love you all, and I will be watching you from above.

As Beulah's speech ends, her voice fades slowly. Lola slowly drops the papers from her reading, as in a state of shock.

LANI

See baby, she said it herself. You need to help preserve her memory. This is *your* task Lola. You have to do it. Then, the money is yours.

LOLA

(obviously shaken)

C-can I think about it, mom? Get back to you on it?

Lani puts her hand on Lola's shoulder, and embraces her warmly.

LANI

Of course, Lola. Take your time. I know it's a lot to think about. Just let your father and I know as soon as you can.

LOLA

Sure, mom... I think I just need some time to think. This is all happening faster than I can breathe.

LANI

All right, baby. I will let you be.

Lani leans in and kisses Lola on the forehead. She exits. Lola sits down, obviously exhausted after the conversation with her mother.

SOUND: A knock on the door

LOLA

Yeah—come on in.

DEX walks in from the opposite side of the stage. Dex is young, and hip. He wears large square glasses, and tight fitting jeans. His shirt should be whatever

is currently in fashion, or just on the cutting edge. His shoes are Doc Martins, just like Lola's. His hair is in dreadlocks (or simply long), and he has a well-kept beard.

He walks in with confidence, drumsticks in hand.

DEX

Hey babe! I just played a rockin' show downtown!

He spins his drumstick and throws it up, catching it in his hand.

DEX

(con't)

What's shakin'? (beat) You okay?

LOLA

(panicked rambling)

Dex! I'm glad you're back! I don't know what I am going to do. I just found out I am the heir to my Grandma Beulah's secret stash of money, but apparently her grave has disappeared and now I have to work with Armin to find her and UGH! I just can't believe this! And and and—

DEX

(interrupting)

Babe... Calm down. Take a breath, okay?

Dex grabs Lola's shaking hands, and she begins to breath in and out slowly.

DEX

(con't)

Now, Lola, what's up? You got some money from your grandma? That's great! How much?

LOLA

It's ninety thousand dollars...

DEX

Ninety thousand, eh? You know what that means?

LOLA

Oh do I... We could finally open up our art studio downtown, and make a name for ourselves. Doing music, art and performance on a regular basis. It would be perfect.

DEX

Then what are you waitin' for?! Why are you so upset? We are one step away from living our dreams!

LOLA

Oh Dex! I know that! It's just I have to find out what happened to my grandmother... Her grave simply disappeared and no one knows what happened to her.

DEX

Her grave disappeared? How does that even happen?!

LOLA

You're telling me! But that's not the part that's bothering me. I mean it upsets me that my grandma's grave is gone, but I am not sure if I can go through with finding her.

DEX

Why not? I think finding your grandmother is a really lofty cause, Lola.

LOLA

I would have to work together with Armin.

DEX

Armin? Ya mean your old man?

LOLA

Yeah... Armin. You know how I feel about him, and how he feels about us.

DEX

Boy, do I ever. Seems like you have a lot of thinking to do, Lola. (Yawns) Babe, I am tired. I am gonna go to bed. Let me know if you need me, okay?

LOLA

Okay. Thanks Dex.

Dex kisses Lola gently, and begins to walk offstage. He turns around quickly.

Lola?
 DEX
 Hmm?
 LOLA
 It's your decision and all... but if it was me, I would go for it. G'night.
 DEX
 Night, babe. I'll be in a bit.
 LOLA

Lola sits alone for a moment, staring out as if in deep thought. She picks up the phone next to her chair. She taps her knee nervously.

SOUND: A phone ringing

LIGHTS: On the opposite edge of the stage, a spotlight flickers in coordination with the sound of the phone's ring.

After the phone rings two or three times, we see Armin rushing to answer it.

Armin looks very similar to the beginning of the play, but is currently in pajamas, a bit disheveled as if he was sleeping.

H-hello?!
 ARMIN
 (coldly)
 All right, Armin, let's get together. Let's find Grandma Beulah.
 ARMIN
 Oh thank God! Oh thank you, Bubbles.
 LOLA
 Don't call me that, Armin.

ARMIN

(sighing)

Damn, you sure grew up to be something else. Still with that *Dex* character?

LOLA

I'll see you tomorrow, Armin.

ARMIN

At least call me da—

Armin is interrupted by Lola hanging up the phone. The lights go off on Lola's side of the stage as she hangs up the phone.

Armin walks towards the center of the stage.

ARMIN

We weren't always like this. She was a good kid. A sweet, little girl. It was that *Dex* and that so-called-art of hers that ruined her. I tried to care. I just wanted to protect her. If only she understood...

Armin looks up as if talking to the heavens.

ARMIN

(con't)

Oh mama, I pray we find you.

Armin does the sign of the cross.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP

We see a living room set. It can be small, and use some of the same elements as Lola's studio. This is supposed to be Armin and Lani's home. Lani is sitting in a chair, knitting something. DEWEY is on the couch, reading a magazine. He should look like a younger version of his father, Armin. He has a scruffy beard, thick hair, and a button-down plaid shirt. He is a large man, but seems sensitive. Armin is sitting on the floor, a wooden duck decoy in his hands. He is carving away at the wood.

Enter Lola. She rushes in quickly. She kisses Lani on the cheek, hugs Dewey and seems to ignore Armin.

LOLA

Hello mom! Looks like your scarf is coming along! Dewey, what's up?! I miss you! I wish you would visit more. (beat) Oh. Hi, Armin.

LANI

Hi baby! I am glad to see you today! Thanks for noticing! I am making it for Dewey! Won't he look nice?!

DEWEY

(laughing)

Oh mom.. I am not sure if I am a scarf wearing guy! Hey lil' sis. Heard you're going out with dad today. Glad you guys are finally taking some time to spend together.

LANI

Isn't it great? Other than the fact that it's for such a sad reason, I think it is wonderful that these two stubborn goats finally get together! (beat) Oh Dewey! This will look SO nice on you! Come on, you know burnt pumpkin is totally your color! Oh it will make your eyes just shine! Oh speaking of pumpkin! I think I smell my pumpkin pie! I better go check on it!

Lani walks out of the room, and Dewey goes back to reading his magazine.

ARMIN

Mhmm... I can't wait for some of that pie. Lord knows your mom makes the best pie in the whole town. Hey Bubbles. How are ya today?

LOLA

My name isn't Bubbles, Armin. It's Lola. No one has called me Bubbles since I was five years old. And I'm fine. Life's going well.

ARMIN

Does that mean you finally dumped that punk-ass of a boyfriend? God, him and his ridiculous hair—

LOLA

(matter-of-fact)

No, Armin, I haven't. Just in case you didn't know, we live together full time now. Eat, sleep, have sex—

Suddenly Armin accidentally cuts his thumb with his carving blade.

ARMIN

GODDAMMIT! MY THUMB!

LANI

(shouting from offstage)

What is going on in there?!

Lani rushes back in the room, pumpkin pie in hands, after hearing Armin's shriek. She drops the pie on the floor and it splatters everywhere.

ARMIN

Not a thing, Lani. I just cut my damn thumb open!

LANI

Oh my goodness! Hold on, Armin! I'll go get the first aid kit!

DEWEY

Yeah, mom, let me help you!

Lani and Dewey rush out of the room, leaving Armin and Lola in complete and

awkward silence. The two of them don't look at each other. This should be an awkward amount of time. Armin acts as if he is about to say something and then Lani and Dewey return with the first aid kit, and Lani tries to fix Armin's thumb.

ARMIN

(annoyed)

I can do it.

Armin grumbles as he grabs the kit from Lani and fixes his own thumb. Armin goes to say something to Lola, and she cuts him off.

LOLA

All right, Armin, let's get outta here.

Lola and Armin get up to go.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

The setting has changed to a graveyard. There should be Spanish moss on some willow-like trees. Graves should be scattered and varying in size. They should look well kept, some having flowers and wreaths on them. One grave should be the focal point, having the name gouged out of the headstone, and fresh dirt surrounding it.

Lola and Armin enter, conversing between themselves a bit. It should look as though they are arguing.

LOLA

Armin... are you sure you know where this grave is?

ARMIN

Of course! You know I used to come here often. Don't you remember coming with me? You used to—

LOLA

(sullenly)

No, Armin. You never took me here. You and Dewey used to go, but you never invited me. Even if I wanted to go.

ARMIN

Oh come on! I am sure I invited you... At least once...

LOLA

(shaking her head)

Never. You never did. (beat) Well where is Grandma Beulah's grave?

ARMIN

Here! Here it is! (pause) Or was...

Armin and Lola walk over to the grave where the name has been gouged out and the dirt is in piles around the grave. Armin gets somewhat emotional, and Lola scoffs.

LOLA

Come on, Armin. Don't get emotional already!

ARMIN

Don't get emotional? *Don't get emotional?* Lola! You don't understand! You-you just don't understand, do you? This was your *grandmother*! My mother! And it pains me that someone could just take her grave, and her memory and just erase her! (pause) Your grandma needs to be remembered! I know you didn't know her—but you need to know what she was like.

They stand by the grave as the lights go out. Armin's voice can be heard as he recalls a memory of Beulah, but we cannot see him or Lola.

ARMIN

(con't)

My mother was one of the most important and kind people I have ever known.

A spotlight goes out in the audience. We see BEULAH. She is a petite woman, dressed in sixties fashion. She has a beehive hairdo, and cat-eye glasses. She wears a floral dress of modest length. She stands up from her seat, and slowly begins to walk towards the stage. She should somehow look like a memory, for she is no longer with us.

ARMIN

(con't)

You know, Lola. I wasn't always a healthy man. No siree, as a kid, I was often sick. Being the youngest child, my mother often doted on me and took extra care when I would get ill. I ended up having to have a kidney removed at the age of seven. I was so scared. When I was in the hospital bed my mother said...

BEULAH

(taking over where Armin trails off)

Don't worry sweetheart, I will be right here when you wake up.

Beulah should be nearing the stage, with the spotlight following her.

ARMIN

And you know what? Right when I opened my eyes, she was the first thing I saw. And-and she had a surprise for me!

Beulah is now onstage, and right by Armin. Lola should not be seen.

BEULAH

Armin, I know how you love jazz music, so I saved up money from my cafeteria job at your school... and I bought you this.

Beulah should mime as though she is giving something to Armin. Armin should act as though he can almost see her.

ARMIN

She gave me my clarinet. My very own clarinet! Oh she must have saved for at least three months to get that instrument for me. And I bet my father had no idea, wanting to keep all the money for only what he deemed "practical" things. But not my mom, not Beulah. *She* had the biggest heart.

Beulah reaches her arm out as if to touch Armin, but then walks past him and offstage. The spotlight on her dims at this time.

LIGHTS UP as we see Armin and Lola again in full light.

LOLA

Wow, Armin. I never knew your mother bought you a clarinet. She really did care about you, and your dreams. (aside, softly) I wish you cared about mine.

Suddenly, GRAVEYARD ATTENDANT walks towards them from the opposite side of the stage. He should look somewhat frightening, foreboding. He has on all black and gray, and is very pale. He holds a shovel over his shoulder. He should be walking right across stage in a slow manner. At first, he should ignore Lola and Armin.

LOLA

(con't)

Perfect! Just who we need to speak with! Excuse me! Sir!

ARMIN

(interrupting, whispering)

Lola! Lola! Stop that! I don't like the look of that guy!

LOLA

(scoffing)

You sure do like to judge people just by their looks don't you? (beat) Sir, sir! Please!

Graveyard attendant turns around and stares at Lola. Lola walks over to him, tentatively. She begins to lose a bit of her nerve.

LOLA

H-hello, sir! I-I—

GRAVEYARD ATTENDANT

(in a monotone voice)

Can I help you?

LOLA

Yes, yes I think you can! You see, my grandmother, his mother's (pointing at Armin) grave was here! But now, well I suppose you can see it isn't here anymore! I was just wondering if you knew what happened?

ARMIN

Come on, Lola... Let's just go... I have a bad feeling about this.

GRAVEYARD ATTENDANT

Well I don't know how or why the body was moved, but yeah I dug 'er up just a couple days ago. I don't know much about what you're talkin' about but I do know where she went.

ARMIN

(anxiously)

Where?! Where!?

GRAVEYARD ATTENDANT

They took 'er over to Bayou Night Graveyard.

LOLA

(gasping in shock)

Isn't that the graveyard where all the bodies are in a mass grave!?

The Graveyard Attendant says nothing. He just stares at the two for a moment and then turns, and continues offstage.

LOLA

(con't)

I-I can't even fathom that! Armin can you believe it?

ARMIN

(numbly)

Come on, let's go.

Armin and Lola walk offstage

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

The graveyard should be slightly modified. It should look scarier, grosser, and more unkempt. No longer are their flowers or large graves, but just one or two small gravestones, with no names on them. There should be more Spanish moss, weeds sprung about from years of neglect and the lighting should be slightly dimmer, as if evening is coming.

Armin and Lola walk on stage slowly, cautiously. Armin pauses by the small gravestone, and looks intensely at them.

ARMIN

This grave doesn't even have a name on it—that's really odd.

LOLA

It's probably because there are too many people buried under that miniscule headstone for all their names to be shown (beat) I am going to find the manager of this mess of a place. Wait here, okay Armin?

Armin doesn't say anything; he simply nods. Lola walks offstage, and Armin kneels by the grave, and bows his head in respect.

Lola returns with GRAVEYARD MANAGER. Graveyard manager is an elderly woman, with a hunchback and a limp as she walks. She wears all black, and her wispy gray hair is kept underneath a headscarf. The woman holds a strange cane with which she walks. On top of the cane is a carving of a skull.

LOLA

(con't)

Armin! I found her.

Armin stands up nervously, and adjusts his clothes.

ARMIN

Hello Madame! Please, I am looking for my mother's grave. You see, her body was brought here and we aren't sure as to why. Her name was Beulah Bourgeois Magnusson.

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

(coldly)

I know. Your daughter told me so. Look, sir, on the case of Mrs. Magnusson, it looks like someone sold her grave for a lump sum of thirty thousand dollars, and brought her here to be laid to rest in this grave (pointing at the small headstone Armin was just kneeling by).

ARMIN

S-sold? My mother's grave was sold?

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

Obviously, sir. That is why she is here now and no longer in her larger grave at Elysium Fields.

ARMIN

B-but I don't understand! Who?! Who sold her grave? That was my mother! Why didn't I have any say!

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

I'm sorry, sir but I can disclose that information. All business deals with Elysium Fields and the buying and selling of graves are held very confidentially.

ARMIN

(staring angrily at the woman)

Even if I am her own son!? Don't I have rights!?!

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

Not anymore. All familial rights are lost at the selling of the grave.

ARMIN

I can't believe this... I can't believe this is happening. (beat) But! I mean, I can buy a headstone for my mother right? Or at least some flowers to put on her grave?

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

When the grave was sold, she was put here—in the mass grave below your feet. Mrs. Magnusson is one of over two hundred bodies buried in this grave. Are you going to be able to buy headstones and flowers for all two hundred bodies? I think not. So, if you cannot do that, you cannot put any.

LOLA

Well—how about we want to move her body again? Is that possible?

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

(laughing sarcastically)

Are you serious? Her body along with these other two hundred paupers got so messed up during Hurricane Katrina, that half their bones are lost out to sea. Yes, one with the waves and the tides. The rest of the bones were brought back here in a jumbled mess. Needless to say, we have no idea whose bones are whose. So, you would have to buy DNA tests for each and every bone in this grave. Lil' missy do you *know* how much that would cost? (she scoffs) *You* certainly couldn't afford it.

LOLA

(argumentatively)

Now listen here, *Madame--*

ARMIN

(interrupting)

Stop it Lola. (Beat) What about a small star on the grave? Then it would be no one's name but just a nice, carved star for all of those here?

GRAVEYARD MANAGER

Nothing and I mean nothing will change about this grave. That is my final word.

The Graveyard Manager spits on the ground and hobbles offstage.

As she disappears, Armin falls to his knees and begins to weep at the side of the grave. His sobs are intense, but not over dramatic. Lola tries to put her hand on her father's shoulder, but he pushes her off and continues to cry. Lola slowly puts her hand back at her side, and doesn't say a word. She lets him weep, and mourn.

ARMIN

(between sobs)

Mother! Mother! How did this happen to you!? Y-you were the best mother I could have ever asked for! W-we were so close! How could I let this happen!? I've lost so much! I've lost you, dad, and Cos-

As Armin continues to sob, rain starts pouring. As a sign of compassion, Lola opens up her umbrella, and puts it over her father's head, allowing herself to get wet in the rain.

LOLA

(softly)

I now can visualize how close you and your mother were. Armin, I have never seen you cry... Not like this. You two were so close. It's too bad we aren't.

Armin stops sobbing, and looks up at Lola. The rain should be dulling to a stop by now.

ARMIN

We could be, Lola. We could be. Here, let me tell you another story about my mom.

SOUND: A clarinet playing a smooth, old New Orleans's jazz number.

LIGHTS: Dim on Lola and Armin, on the opposite side of the stage we see YOUNG BERTHA dancing a strange, slow dance as YOUNG ARMIN plays clarinet. Young Bertha and Young Armin should be dressed as children in the 1960's in the United States. The lights should be dim so we don't see the graveyard, but rather just focus on the characters portrayed in the memory.

YOUNG BERTHA

Come on, Armin! Keep on playin'! This is groovy!

Armin says nothing, but keeps playing as his sister dances. Suddenly, HAMPTON storms onto stage. He is dressed in a button down long sleeved shirt, with suspenders attaching his trousers. His horn-rimmed glasses on his face show his age and time period.

HAMPTON

What are you two little fools doing in here!?

YOUNG BERTHA and YOUNG ARMIN

D-dad!?

HAMPTON

Curse the day your mom bought you this stupid clarinet, Armin! All you do is make racket, absolute RACKET on this thing!

Hampton goes to grab the clarinet from Young Armin, and Young Armin holds it close to himself, defensively. Suddenly, there is a voice offstage.

BEULAH

Hampton, darling! Why are you so angry!?

Beulah rushes onstage, and hugs Hampton. As she hugs him, she signals for Young Bertha and Young Armin to move behind.

HAMPTON

I just can't STAND this racket, Beulah! It just sounds like noise!

BEULAH

Oh, darling! It's just a little jazz! Come on, don't you remember how we used to dance to jazz music?

Beulah motions to Young Armin to play, and as he does, she begins slow dancing with Hampton.

BEULAH

(con't)

See? You *do* remember! Now dance with me!

HAMPTON

Oh babe... This *is* our song! Play it, Armin!

Beulah, Hampton, and Bertha laugh happily, as Armin continues to play.

SOUND: The clarinet music fades.

LIGHT: The lighting on the family scene fades, and lights come back up on present day Armin and Lola. This should be a spotlight, which then leads to full lighting when the other family members have made their way offstage.

Obviously, the rain has stopped, and both Armin and Lola sit by the grave.

ARMIN

I think we've seen enough for today, Lola. I think it's about time to go home.

LOLA

(sighing)

Yeah, it certainly has been an emotional day, hasn't it?

ARMIN

It sure has. We can pick up from here tomorrow.

LOLA

(warmly)

Hey Armin?

ARMIN

(with anger)

Damn it, Lola, why can't you call me dad? This shit had to start with that damn art school, and *boyfriend* of yours. When are you gonna see the light of day and realize that you are in a world of hurt! Wake up and smell the coffee, girl. Life isn't about this bullshi—

Lola stands up in a huff, and wipes off her shorts.

LOLA

You know what, Armin? You know what? Nevermind! I was going to tell you that I felt closer to you today than I have in years, but then look at you! You go and mess it up every single time! Look—you may not like the way I live my life, or the man I share my life with, but it's *my* life! So get the hell out of it.

After saying this, Lola storms offstage.

ARMIN

Lola! Lola wait! Lola!

LIGHTS OUT

ARMIN

(con't)

Oh Lola.

ACT TWO

SOUND: A clarinet playing the same jazz tune as earlier, but in a more melancholy fashion.

LIGHTS UP

Back at home, Armin is playing clarinet in one of the chairs in the living room. Lani enters, in a long, woolen nightgown.

LANI

Come on, Armin, I know you only play those old New Orleans songs when you're feeling low... What happened today?

ARMIN

(putting the clarinet down)

Oh Lan'... the day was going well. All until then end.

LANI

Well... how did the day end, honey?

ARMIN

She called me "Armin" again and I just lost it. I started yellin' about her art, lifestyle, that goddamned boyfriend of hers—

LANI

(interrupting)

Oh Armin... When are you going to learn that is not how you talk to a woman? Especially your daughter. Lola is strong-willed. (Laughingly) She gets it from you! You really shouldn't be so hard on Lola. Look, I know you're over-protective but she can't help it that Cosette—

ARMIN

(cuts her off)

Lani, I don't want to remember that day.

LANI

But Armin! You have to! We lost our daughter, Cosette, it HAPPENED. But! We still have a daughter. Don't lose her, too. (Pause) Look, I'm going to bed. Are you ready?

ARMIN

Nah, I think I'm going to stay up for a while.

All right, dear. Goodnight.

LANI

Lani kisses Armin on the forehead and walks offstage. Armin picks up his clarinet, and plays a couple more notes. As he does, he begins to lull to sleep.

LIGHTS: The lights dim as Armin falls asleep. The lights change from the regular white light to a strange shade of blue.

Fog begins to seep from off stage, reinforcing the fact that this is a dream, not reality.

COSETTE walks onstage through the audience. Everything should be quiet. She holds a single white candle in her right hand, and a gun in her left. She should walk regally, gracefully and slowly, as if she is floating. She has the same locket around her neck that Armin now wears. Cosette is a young girl, approximately six to ten years of age. She is wearing a white nightgown, with lace on the bottom and on the long sleeves. She has long, dark hair. There are calla lilies encircling her head, looking almost like a crown or a halo.

Armin hazily opens his eyes, and then jerks to attention when he sees Cosette. He nervously fondles the locket around his neck

Their eyes meet. Cosette stops in her tracks. She holds the gun as if giving it to Armin. Armin doesn't take it.

COSETTE

(giggling)
Come on, daddy! Let's go hunting!

ARMIN
O-oh Cosette, oh baby I don't wanna go hunting...

COSETTE
Oh daddy! You promised! Come on! Let's go catch some ducks at the old bayou.

ARMIN
Baby, no... I can't go. I- I already know what's gonna happen.

COSETTE
Let's go!!!

Cosette giggles as she motions for Armin to stand. Hesitantly, he stands from his chair.

SOUND: Crickets chirping, and water sloshing. Ducks quacking softly.

COSETTE
Daddy! Do you remember this place?!

ARMIN
All too well, baby doll.

COSETTE
(pointing)
See that pond?

ARMIN
Yeah... I see it.

COSETTE
That's where I fell in, right?

ARMIN
(teary eyed)
You're right, sweetheart. That's where you fell in.

COSETTE
And my leg got caught in the crawfish net! Remember?

ARMIN

One of the worst days of my life, Cosette.

Cosette touches Armin's hand, and he holds hers tightly.

COSETTE

Daddy, I'm sorry. I didn't meanta' slip.

ARMIN

Cosette, it's not your fault! You were just a baby. That's why I shouldn't have let you go ahead of me. I shouldn't have ever even let you go hunting with me that day. Now all I have left of you is this locket... Always close to my heart.

He touches the locket, and Cosette mimics him and touches hers.

COSETTE

You don't just have my locket—you have my memory too. Besides, daddy! You know how much I loved hunting. That was my favorite! Without hunting, I would have been so sad. The crickets, the quiet, the smell of the water. That made me who I was! You're little hunter girl! (beat) Besides, I would have snuck out and come here. It was just my time.

Cosette blows out the candle and begins to walk offstage.

ARMIN

Cosette! Cosette wait!

Cosette turns around

COSETTE

Goodbye daddy. And remember, you can't control your daughters. You see... we're like the flowers that bloom through the cracks in the pavement. No matter how much you try to stomp us down, we'll still shine through. We have to live—and die—the way we're supposed to. Love Lola. She loves you, she always has. Keep my locket safe, okay?

Cosette walks offstage, and Armin slumps back in his chair, the same way he was when he first went to sleep. He holds the necklace and falls asleep.

LIGHTS OUT

SOUNDS: All the sounds of the bayou have diminished.

LIGHTS UP

It is morning at Lola's studio. Dex is sitting in the chair with a cup of coffee, and a magazine. He should be wearing some kind of sleepwear. Lola rushes onstage slightly disheveled. She grabs a cup of coffee, and a cigarette and sits by Dex. Dex leans over and lights Lola's cigarette, and kisses her cheek.

DEX

Hey there, hurricane girl. Slow down a minute. Ya sleep okay? You were tossin' and turnin' all night.

LOLA

Not at all. Ugh, I just couldn't keep my eyes closed. I'm still bothered about the mess that was yesterday. And now I have to go back and deal with Armin again.

DEX

Yeah, that's what I figured. Look, Lola at least you could have a relationship with your dad. I mean sure, he doesn't like me, or what you're doing in the city, but he still *cares*. You know how my dad and I never had a relationship. And now... well, you know. (Pause) In some ways, I really envy the fact that you could have something with your dad. You can't just throw him away—he's the only one ya got. I mean...

Lola rubs out the cigarette in an ashtray and gets up and walks towards the exit.

LOLA

(dismissively)

Okay, okay, but I have got to go, Dex! There's plenty of shit I have to do today.

Lola pauses and turns around.

LOLA

(con't, more empathetically)

Look—I'm sorry if I just came off as insensitive. Maybe you're right. I'll *try* and give him a chance today. We're meeting up with his family. I haven't seen any of them in years. Wish me luck, babe.

DEX

You won't need it; you'll be fine.

LOLA

(eyes welling up with tears)

Oh, Dex... I just don't know. I just am so tired of him critiquing me, and you, and everything we do.

Lola covers her face with her hands, as if crying, and Dex rushes over to her. He hugs her.

DEX

Awe, come on babe. It's all right. (Pause) Look, only a couple more days, we'll get the money, and then everything we have been dreamin' about can come true. So cheer up. Just think of the future, and not right now. Lord knows, that's saved me. Always look up, all right?

Lola wipes her eyes, and nods.

LOLA

Always look up. Okay, Dex. I'll try. (beat) See you in a while.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

The setting is back to Armin's living room. We see Armin pacing nervously, and Lani is bringing out a tray of food.

ARMIN

Where *is* everyone!? Lani! I told them to be here for noon and no one is here!

LANI

(sighing)

Oh Armin, you know your family. They're *always* late for everything. Hell Bertha was late to your mother's funeral. They'll be here. Ugh, I just wish they didn't have to come here. Lord knows they always make a mess of my house and eat everything.

ARMIN

Come on, Lani! They're my family! Cut them some slack. I love them, and you should too!

LANI

(under her breath)

Lord knows I try...

SOUND: A knock of a door.

Instead of waiting to be invited in, BERTHA barges in. Bertha is a large woman, who doesn't seem to take good care of herself. She wears a shirt that is two sizes too small with pants that don't button well, and slippers. She has a massive, tacky purse on her arm. Her hair is frizzy.

BERTHA

Hey Armin! Get over here and tell your big sissy hello! (beat) Oh.. *hi* Lani.

LANI

Hello, Bertha.

ARMIN

Hey Bertha, ol' girl! Glad to see ya! Have a seat anywhere all right! Do you know where Aaron or Charlie are?

BERTHA

Yeah, yeah yeah... They're on their way. Have any food, broski?

LANI

Well, Bertha, I just made this great guacamole and hummus with some veggies to dip in them!

BERTHA

Hummus? Guacamole? Ya gotta be kidding me, Lani. Armin! What else ya got? (Pause) Ah, nevermind! I'll go look for myself.

Bertha waddles over offstage, and Lani glares at Armin, who just shrugs his shoulders.

SOUND: A knock of a door.

Armin goes to answer it, and CHARLIE and AARON come on stage. All the men embrace, and laugh. Lani comes over, and hugs them as well.

AARON

Hey Lani! Oh it's so good to see you! Armin—I always did say you caught yourself a keeper here!

LANI

Oh Aaron, you always know what to say! Can I get you guys something to drink?

AARON

I'd love a beer, Lani!

CHARLIE

Got any whiskey?

LANI

Oh you know it, Charlie! You know how Armin over here loves his whiskey.

Bertha appears back onstage, her arms filled with sugary donuts

BERTHA

Did I hear someone say whiskey?! Lani, pour me a glass will ya?

LANI

Sure... I'll be right back.

BERTHA

Oh and Lani? Why don't ya put one of those frozen pizzas in the oven? And add some extra pepperoni and sausage will ya!

LANI

(agitated)
Sure thing, Bertha...

Lani exits

CHARLIE

So, Armin... What is this news you wanted to tell us?

ARMIN

Well, Charlie, let's wait for Lola to get here. She's helping me out.

SOUND: A knock at the door.

Lola walks in nervously, and Lani enters from the opposite side of the stage with drinks in her hands.

LOLA

Hi, everyone.

AARON

Wow, Lola! You sure have grown up since I last saw you!

LOLA

Well it has been about ten years since I have seen you, Uncle Aaron! Ever since you moved up to Metarie, we don't see you much!

BERTHA

(staring Lola up and down)

Yeah... she certainly has gotten weird hasn't she?

Lola winces at the comment, but ignores it. She sits by Aaron.

ARMIN

Well now that we're all here, I will tell y'all what this is about. Look guys, mom's been unearthed and placed in an unmarked grave.

Aaron, Bertha and Charlie gasp.

ARMIN

(con't)

You see, someone sold her grave, and for the life of me I can't figure out who would have the means to do that or *why* someone would do that. So I thought we should all have a family meeting, and then work together. So! Anyone have any ideas?

LOLA

I'll be taking notes, just in case we can brainstorm something.

CHARLIE

You mean... mom??? How in God's name did this happen!?

ARMIN

That's what we're trying to figure out, Charlie. So you don't have any ideas?

CHARLIE

No... No! Not at all! Where's mom now?

LOLA

She's at Bayou Night Graveyard.

AARON

Bayou Night Graveyard?! That hellhole!? Who coulda' done this?!

BERTHA

Well obviously not one of us. How could someone do that to their own mother! Do you think it was some... distant relative?

ARMIN

Well that could definitely be the case. But who?

BERTHA

Well I mean look at Great Uncle Richie. He is sure a weird guy!

AARON

You know what!? That's true! Great Uncle Richie never got along with mom either...

ARMIN

Lola, write that down!

Lola nods and scribbles in her notepad.

BERTHA

Or maybe it was someone even closer... Lola! How could you afford that nice apartment of yours in downtown?

LOLA

What are you insinuating, Auntie Bertha?!

BERTHA

I'm just sayin'... How can two broke artists make it in the city, hmmm? Yeah you and your little weirdo punkass boyfriend. Maybe you needed some money? What do you think Armin?

I... I guess I never thought of that..

ARMIN

(in tears)

Armin! What are you saying?!

LOLA

ARMIN

Well really, I mean how could two bohemians really pay for a place down there. Maybe that lazy boyfriend of yours made you do it.

CHARLIE

Come on guys! Stop pickin' on the girl!

Lani comes in from offstage.

LANI

All right all of you! Pizza time! (Beat) Oh... am I interrupting? Lola, are you okay?

BERTHA

Forget about her, let's eat!

Bertha leads the pack of brothers towards the stage. Lani waits behind. She walks towards Lola.

LANI

Sweetie...

LOLA

(interrupting)

You know what? It's okay mom. Go ahead. I'll just eat some hummus. I need a minute alone.

Lani touches Lola's shoulder, and walks offstage.

Lola stares out at the audience. She sees Bertha's ugly purse, and punches it off the table. Documents fall out of the purse, and Lola hastily begins to pick them up, hoping not to be caught. She holds one up and begins to read it.

SOUND: The other characters are coming back onstage, and Bertha's voice can be heard loudly.

Lola hurriedly puts one of the papers in her pocket.

Charlie, Bertha and Aaron are talking amongst themselves; one could even say the whiskey and beer they were drinking has started to take effect.

Lola grabs Armin's arm.

LOLA

Armin! I need to show you something!

SOUND: A knock at the door.

Armin pulls his arm away.

LANI

I'll get it!

Lani goes to the side of the stage. She comes back with Dex, holding a small lunchbag in his hand.

LANI

Lola! You have a visitor...

ARMIN

What are *you* doing here?!

DEX

Hello, Mr. Magnusson, Mrs. Magnusson. I just need ta' talk with Lola a minute. I just wanted to make sure she had some lunch. I mean—you know how she's a vegan and all.

ARMIN

Nope! Not in my house! For all I know it's *your* doing that got my mom's grave moved!

DEX

(in shock)

Wh-what??? Mr. Magnusson I—I--

LOLA

Armin! That's IT! That's just IT! I have had it up to here with you and your judgment! Dex came over to bring me *lunch*! He knows you would just try to feed me something I wouldn't eat—hell maybe you'd make me kill my pet rabbit again! All you can do is judge me and everything I love—my art, my apartment, my lover...

ARMIN

(interrupting)

Damn it, Lola! I just want you to get your head out of the clouds! Come back to earth! This guy and that art you make aren't going to get you anywhere! WAKE UP!

LOLA

I'm so done. Good luck finding Beulah on your own. Come on, Dex.

DEX

Uh... have a nice day, everyone. Sorry for the intrusion.

Lola grabs Dex by the hand, and drags him offstage.

LANI

Armin! How DARE you act like that to our daughter??? How could you!?

Lani storms offstage. Bertha pats Armin on the shoulder.

BERTHA

You sure showed her whose boss! Sometimes kids just gotta know how it is. Besides did you see how defensive she got!?

CHARLIE

Do you really think those two kids coulda done that?

BERTHA

Absolutely. Well bros, I needa get outta here! Time for Bertha to head over to her favorite bar and see if she can pick up a nice young man (she smacks her butt and winks). ADIOS!

Bertha exits.

CHARLIE

And I have to get back to the bakery—duty calls! Armin, please keep me posted on if you find out who did this to mom...

ARMIN

I will, Charlie. Don't you worry.

Charlie exits.

Aaron pats Armin on the shoulder, and they embrace.

ARMIN

Damn, Aaron why does everything seem to go to shit these days? I can't say or do anything right. I just wanna find out who did this to mama...

AARON

Look Armin, we'll find out. Just give it to God. You need to just relax a minute. You have been working like crazy on this. Besides, you really treated your daughter and her boyfriend badly.

ARMIN

(defensively)

She's just not practical! She just wants to live her life like a hippie, make art, and love this guy who is brainwashing her!

AARON

Come on, Armin. Is he *really* brainwashing her? Even the little Lola I remember loved art more than anything. Hell, every year I would buy her some kind of art kit!

ARMIN

Well sure, she's always loved art! But there's a time to grow up. Get your head out of the clouds. She could be doing something so much better with her life. She could be a nurse, a translator, hell even a mother married to a wealthy husband!

AARON

But she *loves* art. She is a plucky girl to have chosen it! You know what's weird, Armin? You said the exact thing to Lola that dad said to you when you were about that age... Don't you remember? "Get your head out of the clouds"?

The lights dim on Armin and Aaron. We see YOUNG ARMIN in a spotlight. Young Armin is near the front of the stage, playing his jazz clarinet. The song

should be upbeat, and artfully played. Hampton is behind him, and walks slowly to the front from the shadows behind Young Armin and pulls Young Armin by the shoulder.

HAMPTON

Armin! What are you doing?! I told you, you need to get over this music and start working in the shipyard! It's quarter to eight! You're gonna be late!

YOUNG ARMIN

But dad! You know I don't wanna work on ships... I want to play clarinet! It's my dream! Besides, look! I got a scholarship to the school of music at NYU!!

Young Armin pulls a piece of paper from his pocket. Hampton reads it, and rips it into pieces. He holds the pieces in a tight fist.

HAMPTON

Armin! What are you thinking!?! You ain't gonna make money being some jazz musician! Besides, that scholarship may cover your tuition, but it sure as hell won't cover an apartment, food, utilities, and transportation! Get your head out of the clouds! This is reality! Now come on—we're gonna be late.

YOUNG ARMIN

Dad! It-it's my dream! How can you just rip it up like that?!

HAMPTON

Armin, there comes a day in every man's life where he has to wake up from the dreams of his childhood. Today it's your turn.

Hampton throws the pieces of the scholarship letter up in the air like confetti as he walks offstage. Young Armin just stands there, in shock of what has happened.

SPOTLIGHT OUT

LIGHTS UP on Armin, and Aaron.

AARON

I remember you tried that same thing on Lola. You ripped up her letter to art school, but that girl! She pieced it back together. She has tenacity, that one. You know, Armin? Part of me thinks you wish you would have done the same. Been strong enough to stand up to dad.

ARMIN

I guess I never thought of it that way... Aaron! I made a big mistake! I need to go talk to her!

AARON

(laughing)

You're damn right you do! Go!

Armin rushes to leave. Before he does, he turns around.

ARMIN

Hey Aaron?

AARON

Hmm?

ARMIN

Thanks.

AARON

Hey... What are big brothers for?

LIGHTS OUT

ACT THREE

Scene begins at Lola's studio. Lola is posing for some kind of artistic photo, and Dex is taking it.

Without knocking, Armin rushes in.

ARMIN

(out of breath)

Lola! Lola!

LOLA

Oh no! I DON'T want to talk to you! Get outta here!!

Lola rushes off stage in the other direction. Armin crashes into a chair. Dex goes and sits by him.

ARMIN

(still out of breath)

Oh... man... I will never get through to that girl.

Dex gets up and pours each of them a glass of whiskey. He offers one to Armin, who takes it suspiciously.

DEX

(laughs softly)

Don't mind her, Mr. Magnusson. Lola likes the dramatics from time to time. Sometimes, I even call her Hurricane Girl because of her whirlwind attitude. She'll come around.

ARMIN

How do you deal with that?

DEX

I just give her time. We all have our faults, and that's one of hers I guess. But, it's also what makes Lola special. She's enthusiastic, dramatic, and exciting. Sure she gets bent out of shape every now and then, but everyday is thrilling being around her. (beat) You know she loves you right?

ARMIN

Naw, I messed that up long ago.

DEX

Sir, we all mess up sometimes. It doesn't mean love goes away. Besides, Lola only throws fits like this when she really cares about someone. If she didn't love you, she wouldn't even speak to you—just coldly stare past you.

ARMIN

You seem to know my daughter well... What's your name again?

DEX

(laughing)

It's Dex, Mr. Magnusson. Short for Dexter.

ARMIN

Dexter, thanks for talking with me.

DEX

Not a problem, sir. I think it's important you and Lola work these things out. If my dad were around... I sure would want him in my life.

ARMIN

Where's your father son?

DEX

Oh, he died a couple of years back. Ya see, he was the head firefighter for the city. But when he was goin' in to one house he just never came out. And the last words we spoke to each other were not what I wish they would have been. I was still bitter about my parents' divorce, and I just couldn't look at him the same way. Now, I wish I just would've told him how much I loved him. You only get one set of parents....

ARMIN

...And only one set of kids.

DEX

How 'bout I go check on Hurricane girl, okay? You wait here.

ARMIN

Okay, Dexter. And thanks.

DEX

Not a problem, Mr. Magnusson.

Dex exits, and shortly after, Lola enters without Dex. She has the document under her arm.

LOLA

Sorry about that, Armin. What can I help you with?

ARMIN

Lola, I just came here to apologize. I didn't realize how wrong I was about you, and Dexter...

LOLA

(interrupting)

Wait? You actually know his name?

ARMIN

Yeah, we just had a nice conversation. I can see how much he really cares about you. Also, I know how much you love your art, and I respect that. You know how much I wanted to play clarinet, and I even got a scholarship to go but my dad ripped it up, and I had to go to work.

LOLA

Sounds familiar...

ARMIN

But you Lola had the tenacity! And... and I am proud of you for that.

LOLA

Thanks Armin... I mean dad. Look, I have always wanted a relationship with you. I know I can get hot headed at times, but it's never been my intention to disrespect you or act like I don't care. It's just hard to when I'm under a microscope, my every move being critiqued.

ARMIN

Lola, I am going to try my hardest to understand you. Just like my mother understood me. I want to be like her.

LOLA

I'm sure you already are, dad. (beat) Oh! Speaking of Beulah... I found *this* in Auntie Bertha's purse...

Lola hand the paper to Armin who reads it carefully. He gasps in shock.

ARMIN

(reading the paper)

"I, Bertha Joanna Heigel do sell the plot for the grave of Beulah Bouergois Magnusson for \$30,000. I consent that she was my blood, and that I have discussed this with the other members of her family. I accept that I will no longer have rights with the body, and that it will be shipped to Bayou Night Graveyard to be placed in a large, unmarked grave."

Armin begins to weep, and Lola hugs him tightly, letting him cry into her.

ARMIN

(con't)

I-I can't believe it! My own sister!?! And then she was accusing you of stealing it!

LOLA

She just wanted to cover her tracks, that's all. (beat) Dad, we need to confront her on this. We need her help in getting the grave back! Can you call her and have her come over here ASAP?

ARMIN

Sure, but how will I get her over here? Lord knows you and her don't get along!

LOLA

Tell her I want to apologize to her. Maybe say I am making lasagna... Lord knows she has never turned that one down! Besides, I have one in the oven now.

ARMIN

I didn't know you could cook.

LOLA

You'd be surprised what I can do. So call her, and I'll finish up in there.

Lola exits, and Armin picks up the phone.

ARMIN

Hello, Bertha? Why don't you come on over to Lola's? She wants to apologize and has lasagna...

A loud rushed knock at the door. Without having anyone answer it, Bertha runs in.

BERTHA

Did you say lasagna!?

ARMIN

My, my that was fast!

BERTHA

Eh, I was in town! Now where's that food?!?!?

LOLA

(offstage)

I'm coming, Auntie Bertha.

Lola comes in with the lasagna and the letter. She serves Bertha, Armin and herself. Bertha begins to eat ravenously.

ARMIN

Bertha, there's something else we need to talk about.

BERTHA

(between bites of food)

Yeah? What is it?

ARMIN

We know what you did. We know you sold mama's grave.

Bertha drops her fork and stands up, enraged.

BERTHA

I did NO such thing! How DARE you accuse me of that!? It was probably this little weirdo and her boyfriend, and NOW she is just trying to accuse me!

LOLA

Well Auntie Bertha, my dad *may* have believed you with that story, until I found this.

Lola holds up the paper, and Bertha gasps.

BERTHA

Where in God's name did you find that?!

LOLA

It doesn't matter Auntie Bertha. All that matters is that we know the truth.

ARMIN

Why did you do it, Bertha? We're family. You didn't even call one of us to ask if it was okay.

BERTHA

Well sure, I did it—and I'd do it again! I needed the money!

ARMIN

But Bertha, you could have asked Charlie, Aaron or I for money... You know that.

BERTHA

No way. I'm a big girl. I don't need handouts from y'all. I knew I could get the money somehow, and see? I did! It's not like mama even knows!

ARMIN

But she's your mother? Don't you have any respect?!

BERTHA

Respect? For her? All she did was ignore me, and dote on you! YOU got all the nice things, YOU got seconds at dinner! All I got were smacks, and dirty looks. I *hope* she is forgotten. Just how she made me feel.

ARMIN

Bertha! You know that's a lie!

BERTHA

Look, Armin, what's done is done. And you know what? There's nothing you two can do about it. Look at the receipt. I got my money, and they got the plot. Simple as that.

LOLA

Listen HERE Auntie Bertha—

ARMIN

That's enough, Lola. Bertha, please just leave us.

BERTHA

Fine! Good riddance!

Bertha storms out.

LOLA

Well, I guess she's right. What's done is done. At least we now know who did it.

ARMIN

And I got my daughter back. (Hands Lola an envelope) Here's your inheritance. I am sure your grandma is smiling down on us now. But I gotta go, honey. I need to be alone for a little while.

LOLA

Okay, dad. Take care.

The two hug, and Armin exits. Lola opens the envelope to reveal a check.

LOLA

Dex..! I got the check.

DEX

Time to start on our studio! Great work, babe. Where'd your dad go?

LOLA

He just left. He's really upset about the whole thing. I mean, who could have guessed his sister would sell his mother's grave? I finally am feeling closer to my father. I felt so bad to see the light fade from his eyes when his sister said there is nothing we can do about it.

DEX

Well... maybe there is?

LOLA

What do you mean?

Dex goes over to Lola and whispers something in her ear. She smiles and hugs him.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHTS UP

Back at the Elysium Fields Graveyard. The set should look the same, except there is one grave that is beautifully made in the center of the stage. The grave should look artistic, and unique.

Armin is walking with a blindfold over his eyes, and Lola is leading him.

ARMIN

Where in tarnation are we?!

LOLA

Okay... take your blindfold off!

Armin takes his blindfold off to see the grave. He looks back at Lola.

ARMIN

Wh-what is this?

LOLA

I decided to use the money Grandma Beulah gave me to find her body, and lay it to rest in it's own grave. Then, Dex and I made this stone for her.

ARMIN

You did this?!

LOLA

Yeah, I did. I knew how much it would mean to you and Beulah's memory.

ARMIN

But what about your studio?

LOLA

It'll come in time! Besides, we still have a little nest egg left. We'll get there.

ARMIN

Thank you, Lola. Thank you for this.

They hug.

LIGHTS OUT

LIGHT: Sole spotlight in the front of the stage. It should not catch the sets behind it, and be close to how it was in the beginning when Lola narrated. Lola stands in the center.

LOLA

That was the day I knew my Grandma Beulah was free again. You could sense her in the air, as I showed my father the grave. She can rest in peace. I never thought through this experience I would evolve as much as I had. Not only did I find Beulah, but I found my father.

And my Auntie Bertha? Well, a bad deed never seems to go unpunished...

LIGHT: Behind Lola on one part of the stage, the lights should look like a large fire.

Bertha is standing in front of the fire, hands to her head, appearing to be in agony.

LOLA

(con't)

Auntie Bertha's house went up to flames one night, the firefighter said it was because she fell asleep with a cigarette in her mouth. That same night, she lost her mind. No longer can she remember anything. Kind of funny—she tried to take away Grandma Beulah's memory only to lose hers. This has been a journey of discovery, and I have learned so much.

You must love your family, and always take time to understand and appreciate those around you, never forgetting who you are and where you come from. For green leaves on the trees are nothing without the branch, trunk and root from which they grow.

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY