BURIED TREASURE

a play by jaclyn backhaus

for baltimore center stage
for ernie, fiona, and carson

(and their parents)
CHARACTERS

CARSON, 11
FIONA, 11
ERNEST, 11

SETTING

a pretend or real cave in one of the arizona foothills near a suburb of phoenix, az
sometime in the nearish future
a cave
it is dark and drippy
lanterns strewn about
stalactites
stalagmites
maybe it is actually a tunnel underneath a road at the end of a dirt wash
but our characters are eleven years old
so it's a real cave

speaking of:

CARSON is the child of chris and amy
he's one of those moptops with sad eyes
a natural born leader
loves bikes
very good at soccer
grows up with a dog
he moved to the desert from virginia
which had a lot of leaves that he now misses

ERNEST is the child of jaclyn and andrew
he's peppy and bright-eyed
he has a big heart and big feelings
he doesn't have a dog yet so he's very jealous of carson
he moved to the desert from New York City
and he misses the natural history museum

FIONA is the daughter of sunil and robin
she's got more energy than any of them
big big big imagination
wild head of hair
her mom is a circus acrobat and her dad is a mathematician
so her interests are varied
she moved to the desert from Boston
so she freaks out for New England Sports Teams

it's the last day of summer
before the first day of middle school
they're all headed into 6th grade!

ernest checks the map
which is on a stack of paper plates
fiona runs the walls of the cave with her hand

FIONA

i'm bored
CARSON
what does the map say?

ERNEST
hold on i’m checking
i have to line the plates up juuuuust right

FIONA
i’m gonna check for cave writings

can i see em??

ERNEST
hold on i’m not done

FIONA
the walls are cold. good to know

CARSON
lemme see the map

ERNEST
hold on
i think i get it

CARSON
ernest lemme see the map

FIONA
ew!
slimy!
i found a slimy part of the wall!!
gross
good to know though

ERNEST
i think we should start digging here

CARSON
ernesssssst lemme see ittttttt

ERNEST
where are the shovels

carson
give it
ERNEST

here

ernest gives carson the map plates

CARSON

hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

ERNEST

where are the shovels

FIONA

in my backpack
watch out for my cheez its
don’t crush my cheez its
i walked all the way to safeway to get those

CARSON

wait which way do the plates go?

they connect
here this is the top one
here lay them out on the floor

CARSON

it’s really confusing

ERNEST

my mom made them in 2003 with fiona’s dad
i don’t think they were meant to be understood by anyone but them

CARSON

how come my dad wasn’t there? or my mom?

FIONA

maybe they weren’t invited

CARSON

but they were all friends. right?

ERNEST

yeah
our parents know each other in middle school

CARSON

my mom knew your mom in middle school
and my dad knew fiona’s dad
FIONA (a little song)

yeah
but our dads didn't know our moms til high school
but it's because our dads were best friends and your moms were best friends
that they all became best friends
and then some of them married each other!

CARSON
MINE married each other!! I WIN

FIONA (still singing)

and then they all moved away from the desert
and then they all moved back
and they're all still friends
and now we're friends
and now here we are in a CAAAAAAAAVE

so the map looks like this?

ERNEST

yeah like that
wait no

he moves one plate

like this

here, look
i'm done

sweet

CARSON

FIONA

lemme see

they look

FIONA

the treasure map

ERNEST

of 2003
"the treasure map of 2003"
that's what it's called

FIONA (reading the map)

squiggle
a house
an ironwood tree
the wash
biking from the wash
pick up the rock
tie it to a string
throw it over the fence
make a pulley
hoist
hoist
hoist
squiggle
squiggle
up the hill
pass the jumping cholla patch
voila
you’re at the cave

CARSON
what about when we’re in the cave

ERNEST
i don’t know

FIONA
there’s no X

CARSON
i thought you said there would be buried treasure

ERNEST
there is buried treasure
there has to be
it’s a treasure map

CARSON
did you ask your mom if the map led to treasure?

ERNEST
no my mom didn’t know we found them

CARSON
WHAT?? you stole them??

ERNEST and FIONA
we FOUND them
CARSON
but how are we gonna find the treasure with no X

FIONA
maybe there are clues in the cave!
hurry quick
look for clues

fiona jumps up and starts looking around
ernest follows her

CARSON
where did you find the map you stole?

ERNEST
in this drawer in my mom’s desk
fiona was over
and we were looking for my dad’s old pokemon cards

FIONA
we found a manila envelope that said
“jaclyn and sunil’s treasure map, the treasure map of 2003”

CARSON
so they used the word “treasure” on the envelope
there should have been an X on the map
DESIGN FLAWS

FIONA
help me look for clues

CARSON
i’m gonna eat my lunch

carson rummages in a knapsack.
he pulls out a paper lunch bag
from the paper lunch bag he pulls out a ringpop
he puts it on, licks it casually
watching them search around

ERNEST
the dirt is
softer over here than over here
very small grains
i wonder if that's a clue

FIONA
the soft grain dirt
it means it’s easy to dig??
maybe the treasure was buried where the dirt was softer?
i have a clue too

she flails her arms around like a maniac
pretending to dig with a shovel
shuffling dirt around the cave
a shovel dance

it’s easiest to pretend to dig right here
which means that’s probably where they would have actually done digging

ERNEST
maybe we should start digging
and just see what we find

FIONA
good idea

ERNEST
i’ll do the shoveling
you keep an eye out in case you see anything shiny
emerging from the dirt

FIONA
i can also shovel
i brought two shovels

Fiona grabs garden shovels from her backpack
gives one to Ernest
on their hands and knees they dig

CARSON
what about me

FIONA
there’s one more in my knapsack

carson goes over to knapsack, rummages
still licking the ringpop
he pulls out a tiny rake

CARSON
this is a rake fiona

ERNEST
you can rake the dirt
and make sure we’re not missing anything
FIONA
rake it like a fine toothed comb
like a fine toothed comb

he rakes the dirt halfheartedly while they dig
looking at them
licking ringpop
raking dirt
looking at them
licking ringpop

CARSON
i’m bored
i’m gonna play fantasyland
anyone wanna play?

FIONA and ERNEST
no

FIONA
we’re busy

CARSON
okay, i’ll play by myself

fiona and ernest dig
meanwhile, carson throws down his rake
puts his ringpop in his pocket
takes out a ticonderoga no. 2 pencil from his other pocket
and begins

the rules of Fantasyland
when you enter the land you enter into a room
that room possesses certain qualities and obstacles
that you must overcome with your partner or
in my case
ALONE.
FOR EXAMPLE
lava room
underwater room
jungle room
cloud room
earthquake room
wind room
fire room
jiggly room
marshmallow room
spikes room
ham room
once you cross through the room, overcoming the obstacles or dealing with the qualities
you reach the wall of the other side of the room
at that point, you take your pencil
draw a door and a keyhole

draw a door
and a doorknob

FIONA
and use the pencil as a key to open the door
the door will lead you to a new room
and the cycle of overcoming obstacles begins again
you may play this game for infinity years
BEGIN.

carson draws a door
doorknob
keyhole
opens it

AHHH it’s a tidal wave room!!
carson dodges a tidal wave or two
fiona and ernest keep digging
carson reaches the imaginary wall of the room
draws a door
doorknob
keyhole
opens it

AHHHHH hot fudge room
it’s coming from all sides
carson holds his breath
and dives deep into imaginary hot fudge
he swims through the fudge
periodically opening his mouth to eat some
fiona and ernest are digging

FIONA
So are you excited for middle school?

ERNEST
No

CARSON
The hot fudge is drowning me!
FIONA  
no?

ERNEST  
I'm kinda scared

CARSON  
AHHH MY EYES

FIONA  
Why?

ERNEST  
Well first, there's no recess

CARSON  
MUST. TRUDGE. THROUGH.  
FUUUUUUDGE

FIONA  
We're too old for recess. We're 11

ERNEST  
Also, the cafeteria is like a free for all. There's no one meal, it's so many choices

CARSON  
Aha! The door  
He draws it, unlocks, opens to a new room

WORMS  
he wriggles

FIONA  
I think of that as a freeing thing. You have the freedom to buy whatever you want.

ERNEST  
I guess I just don't trust myself when I'm faced with so many options.  
Do I buy a pizza?  
curly fries and nacho cheese?  
a slush puppy?  
a burger?  
a bean and cheese burrito?

ERNEST  
the worms are tickling me! aha! aha!
FIONA
Well at least the kids will be the same as 5th grade

ERNEST
Not really!
It's our 5th grade class combined with two other elementary schools.
WHO KNOWS who'll be there

CARSON
THE WORMS ARE TRYING TO EAT ME

FIONA
Carson will be there
RIGHT CARSON
YOU’LL BE THERE

CARSON
I’M IN THE WORM ROOM

FIONA
If he ever makes it out of the worm room

Almost-there

FIONA
he makes it to a door, unlocks it, opens it.

serenity

oooh.
floating room

CARSON
he taps his shovel to the ground.
tink tink tink!

i found something

FIONA
Whoa!

ERNEST
Help me dig it out

they dig

CARSON
i am a singular being
lifting slowly
they pull out the box

whoa

FIONA

ERNEST

dusty
carson c'mere look it

CARSON

hold on, lemme float back down to dry land

should we open it?

ERNEST

FIONA

duh

CARSON

okay i'm here.

whoa

dusty

wait cann you try pulling it out of the ground again?

put it back in the ground and pull it out

FIONA

why

CARSON

i want to sneeze when i see it

like in the movies

putting box back in the hole

pretend you just found it

ERNEST (pretend digging)

whoa what's that?

CARSON

is it the treasure?

fiona wipes some dirt away tenderly,
a more labored and elaborate gesture
we found it

take it out!

fiona hoists it out of the earth
she holds it up to carson’s face

look!

carson fake sneezes many times
dirt puffs up all over the place

whoa!
a time capsule

whoa

FIONA and ERNEST

should I open it?

FIONA

put on gloves in case there’s poison in it or toxic sludge

CARSON

good call

ERNEST

should I get out a shield? maybe I’ll stay back in case it blows

FIONA

good idea

CARSON (gloves on)

okay guys. ready?

FIONA

ready

ERNEST

ready

CARSON

pretend I’m i’m i’m an archaeologist
from England
“now that we have unearthed it
it’s time to open the artifact

ERNEST
“open it, sir”

FIONA
“we’re all waiting expectantly sire”

CARSON
wait pretend i have my own archaeology show:
i’m the host:
Sir Clemence Portilsby
“artifacts have been unearthed in these caves before
but this is the first of its kind”

FIONA
open the box

CARSON
say it with an accent

FIONA
“owepin the bohx”

CARSON
“i’ve unjangled the latch
and i am opening the creaky top”

ERNEST

CARSON
what’s THAT

he goes for something in the box

what is this

FIONA
it looks like a squashed alien

he has pulled out a discman

he opens the box
they all scream
carson drops the box
ERNEST
it's definitely an electronics

FIONA
i know about this
it's a compact disc. it goes in the player thing

ERNEST
"2003"
look here's a letter
"liner notes"
who wrote it?

FIONA
does the handwriting match the map?
i can’t tell!

CARSON
you play it with this thing?

ew these are expired
good job, fiona's dad and ernest's mom

he goes to his bag
pulls out an electric plug

ooh
i can plug this into my portable and it’ll give it a charge
give me a sec

ERNEST
what does the note say

FIONA
"meerkat hands."

CARSON
that's all it says?!!!?!????

FIONA
i don't GET IT

ERNEST
I thought the treasure would be a little more exciting

CARSON
what’s more exciting than RETRO TECHNOLOGY
WOOOOO!
i fixed it! wait! here! give me the compact disc.

    carson takes the disc plays the song
    Elton John “SOMEONE SAVED MY LIFE TONIGHT”

read the note again

FIONA

“meerkat hands.”

CARSON

he pretends to be a meerkat

am i doing it right? meerkat hands?
that’s so weird i don’t even GET IT

ERNEST

maybe it’s like an inside joke?
like..
our parents knew each other in middle school
like
they became best friends and they made treasure maps and buried time capsules

are we gonna meet the people we marry
are we gonna meet our best friends
like
tomorrow?

    FIONA

at middle school?
maybe

    ERNEST

that’s too much pressure for me!

    CARSON

hey: maybe you already know your best friends

    Ernest smiles. Fiona and Carson smile. the song continues

ERNEST

i’m just worried that the stuff 6th graders are good at i’m terrible at
sports. and ordering their lunch.
i don’t wanna be a middle school kid.
i wanna be a solar system
a nucleus
a geranium
FIONA
PRETEND I’M A MOUNTAIN GOAT
BAAAAAAAHH

ERNEST
pretend the roof of the cave is the sky

CARSON
pretend the stalactites are stars
look up

FIONA
look how they’re gleaming
pretend when people die they become stars.

ERNEST
okay.

after 6th grade comes the rest of our lives

CARSON
faster than the speed of light, like how stars travel

FIONA
what time are you getting to school tomorrow?

ERNEST
8:15?

FIONA
wanna scope out the scene?

yeah

CARSON
wanna meet by the vending machines?

yeah

The song continues to play
Carson begins to dance a little, swaying.
Fiona joins in, then Ernest
Dancing gets progressively epic
then they slow to standing
fiona puts out her hand
FIONA

meerkat hands

carson and ernie take one

CARSON and ERNIE

meerkat hands

they hold hands,
looking at the roof of the cave
pretending it’s stars
the rest of their lives starts tomorrow

someone saved my life tonight.

end of play