

Because of Beth

By Elana Gartner

When teenage Penny's long-missing father doesn't recognize her at her mother's funeral, she risks her relationship with her irresponsible older sister (Cara) to learn about him and possibly overturn the guardianship her mother chose. In her quest, Penny learns how post-death experiences for the living can be treacherous when secrets are fresh, plentiful and powerful. This monologue is from Act I, Scene VI, and takes place in a graveyard. There is a fresh grave without a headstone. It is late afternoon. Penny enters with her bike. Her backpack is in the basket and she is carrying her violin case. She is looking at each gravestone. She finally comes to the fresh grave. 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 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. *(pause)* 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? *(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 crumples it back up and 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! 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 pause)* 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. *(glares at the grave for a long time. Starts to tear up and angrily brushes it away. Stomps away defiantly to her bike.)*