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The Gravedigger's Lullaby

By

JEFF TALBOTT

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“World premiere produced by TACT/The Actors Company Theatre on March 12, 2017. Scott Alan Evans, Executive Artistic Director, Nora Chester and Jeffrey C. Hawkins, Associate Artistic Directors.”

The Gravedigger's Lullaby received its world premiere at TACT/The Actors Company Theatre, opening March 12, 2017, at the Beckett Theatre (Theatre Row) in New York City.

Cast:

BAYLEN..... Ted Koch
MARGOT KK Moggie
GIZZER Todd Lawson
CHARLES Jeremy Beck

Production Staff:

Executive Artistic Director Scott Alan Evans
Associate Artistic Director Nora Chester
Associate Artistic Director Jeffery C. Hawkins
General Manager..... Jonathan Weber
Set Designer Wilson Chin
Costume Designer Tracy Christensen
Lighting Designer Matthew Richards
Sound Designer Toby Algya
Props Designer Andrew Diaz
Original Music Will Van Dyke
Fight Choreographer Lisa Kopitsky
Production Manager..... Larry Ash
Technical Director..... Andre Sguerra
Stage Manager Kelly Burns
Assistant Stage Manager Jason Richard
Assistant Director..... Megan Nussle
Director Jenn Thompson

The Gravedigger's Lullaby

CHARACTERS

BAYLEN: Approaching middle age.

MARGOT: Younger than BAYLEN.

GIZZER: A little younger than BAYLEN.

CHARLES TIMMENS: Much younger than BAYLEN.

SETTING

The edge of the city.

TIME

Not now. Before.

AUTHOR NOTES

Margot's name is pronounced MAR-gut.

If the play is set after the dawn of electricity, Baylen and Margot's home is lit by a single bare bulb; if before, it's lit by candles.

Be patient with life in this play. Don't rush through action to get back to dialogue. Let these people eat, fight and love. Plenty of time for talking after.

A dash (“—”) is an invitation for overlap.

The play is performed without an intermission.

Sheet music for “Tempest Toss'd (The Gravedigger's Song)” is available at the back of the playbook.

With bottomless gratitude to Jenn Thompson, Ted Koch, Scott Alan Evans, TACT/The Actors Company Theatre, Ben Izzo and Kenneth Jones, this play is dedicated to the memory of my father, Roll Marvin Talbott.

In addition to Ted Koch, KK Moggie, Todd Lawson and Jeremy Beck (the remarkable quartet who gave their all in first supplying these characters with skin, blood and hearts), a great debt of thanks is owed to the following actors who gave their time and talents to the development of this play: Jorden Brodess, Jeffrey C. Hawkins, Rian Jairell, Stephen Kunken, Danny McCarthy, Christa Scott-Reed, Lisa Velten Smith and Lee Stark. The author would also like to thank the following for their support and wisdom in the realization of this play: Ann Arvia, Nathan Anderson, Rick Boynton, Nora Chester, Mark Dold, Laura Durham, Jack Eidson, Barbara Gaines, Wes Grantom, Sean Grennan, Cythia Harris, Kevin Henderson, Chris Hoch, Bob Mason, Edgar McIntosh, Lauren Miller, Heather Schmucker, Tommy Schrider and Will Van Dyke.

The Gravedigger's Lullaby

(BAYLEN and MARGOT's home. A single room. A door to the outside world. There is a central area with a table and chairs, a stove and a sink or washbowl. To one side, BAYLEN and MARGOT's unseen sleeping area is cordoned off by a blanket or screen; to the other side is a much smaller unseen sleeping area behind another blanket or screen. The room is lit only by moonlight and is empty for a long beat.)

BAYLEN enters through the outside door. A working-class man. He is dirty and tired and looks it. He closes the door and makes his way to the table. He lights a candle [or turns on the single bare bulb hanging], and the light that overtakes the room is full of edges and shadows. BAYLEN sits still for a long beat before letting out a low, quiet sigh.)

BAYLEN. All right. Get up, Baylen. Get up.

(He doesn't move. Beat.)

MARGOT *(off, quietly)*. Is that you?

BAYLEN. Hello.

(Beat. From off, the sound of MARGOT getting out of bed. She emerges from behind the partition. She was once pretty.)

MARGOT. There you are.

BAYLEN. Here I am.

(She looks him up and down from a distance before crossing past him to the stove.)

MARGOT. There's stew. I'll get you—

(BAYLEN reaches for her as she passes, but she slips past without him touching her.)

MARGOT *(cont'd, not unkindly)*. Stop it.

BAYLEN. I was just—

MARGOT. Shhhh.

BAYLEN. Mar, I was just—

MARGOT. I know.

(She scoops the remains of a cold, thick stew into a bowl and sets it in front of BAYLEN before sitting down at the table with him. They look at each other for a long moment, barely moving, almost expressionless. Finally, BAYLEN lifts up a spoon and starts digging into the food. He lays his free hand face up on the table while he eats, and eventually MARGOT lays her hand in his. They sit like this, the only sound BAYLEN's eating, until the bowl is empty. BAYLEN looks back up at her and pushes the bowl away.)

BAYLEN. How was it when it was hot?

MARGOT. Hotter.

(BAYLEN lays his other hand on MARGOT's. Beat.)

BAYLEN. Delicious.

MARGOT. You're filthy.

BAYLEN. And you smell like wash on the line.

MARGOT *(clearing BAYLEN's bowl)*. Why so late? It's been dark for—

BAYLEN. I don't make the rules, Mar.

MARGOT. I went to bed.

BAYLEN. I know, but what am I supposed to—

MARGOT. So maybe don't come home expecting—

BAYLEN. I mean, if there's light don't you think I should dig until—

MARGOT. Fine. But be—

BAYLEN. Until there's no more.

MARGOT. Baylen. Quiet.

BAYLEN. All right. OK.

(MARGOT washes the bowl and the pot, and BAYLEN watches her. Beat.)

MARGOT. So, I was thinking ...

BAYLEN. What?

MARGOT. I was thinking today that I should take on some more—

BAYLEN. No, no.

MARGOT. Just wait.

BAYLEN. We're doing fine, Mar.

MARGOT. Sure, but if I took on even two or three more—

BAYLEN. You barely have—

MARGOT. Or three more loads a week, then maybe we could—

BAYLEN. You barely have time for the ones you already have.

MARGOT. I can make more time.

BAYLEN. Oh yeah?

MARGOT. I can.

BAYLEN. You can make more time.

MARGOT. Yes.

BAYLEN. Well, maybe that's what you should do.

MARGOT. What?

BAYLEN. Sell your secret to making more time, then you wouldn't have to—

MARGOT. All right.

BAYLEN. I'm just saying if you can make time, who needs to do people's laundry?

MARGOT. There's no need to be—

BAYLEN. In fact, if you can do that, there must be plenty of other things you can do.

MARGOT. You're an ass.

BAYLEN. I'd like cooler days for the rest of the month, could you arrange for cooler—

MARGOT. Baylen. Hush.

BAYLEN. Or how about an extra day at the end of the week just for us?

MARGOT. All right, could you just let it—

BAYLEN. There's an idea. An extra day at the end of every week that's just for us. Nobody else. Just you and me. Shouldn't be too hard for somebody who can make time.

MARGOT. Forget it.

BAYLEN. Right?

MARGOT. Forget I even brought it up.

(Beat.)

BAYLEN. Margot.

MARGOT. What?

BAYLEN. I used to make you laugh.

MARGOT. You still make me—

BAYLEN. I mean really laugh.

MARGOT. I was sleeping when you came—

BAYLEN. I know, I know.

MARGOT. I'll laugh when I'm not so tired. OK?

BAYLEN. All right.

MARGOT. OK?

BAYLEN. I said all right.

(Beat. MARGOT crosses to BAYLEN and gets very close to him.)

MARGOT. Baylen.

BAYLEN. What?

MARGOT. Look at me.

BAYLEN. Why?

MARGOT. Just ...

BAYLEN. Fine. *(Looks right at her.)* What is it?

MARGOT. I think you're very funny.

BAYLEN. I don't believe you.

MARGOT. I think you're hilarious.

BAYLEN. Well ...

MARGOT. All right?

BAYLEN. I don't know ...

(She kisses him.)

MARGOT. So, so funny.

BAYLEN. I am.

MARGOT. I just said you were.

BAYLEN. Well, good. Because I am.

(They kiss for a sweet moment. Beat.)

BAYLEN *(cont'd)*. Oh.

MARGOT. What?

BAYLEN. I almost ... (*Pulls a small figurine out of his pocket.*) Here.

MARGOT. What is it?

BAYLEN. I don't know. I thought she would—

MARGOT. Is it a toy?

BAYLEN. It is now.

MARGOT. Where did you—

BAYLEN. Second hole of the day. Three feet down.

MARGOT. It was hot today.

BAYLEN. Like digging on the sun. And if I'd been one inch to the right, I would've broken the thing right in half with my blade, but it came out clean as Sunday.

MARGOT. It's nice.

BAYLEN. I think it's ... is it smiling?

MARGOT. I can't tell. It's so little ...

BAYLEN. Anyway, it was the second hole, and I was sweating like a fifteen-cent whore and—

MARGOT. Baylen.

BAYLEN. I was! And grunting like one too.

MARGOT. You're terrible.

BAYLEN. You should've heard me. (*Grunting.*) Urk. Urk. Urk.

MARGOT. Shhhhh. Be—

BAYLEN. I couldn't help it. It was a particularly rough patch, over in the northwest corner, you know?

MARGOT. No trees there.

BAYLEN. No nothing there. So I was throwing myself into it.

MARGOT. Who was the—

BAYLEN. What?

MARGOT. Who was it for?

BAYLEN. Oh. Hm. I don't ... Simp ... Simpson? Hold on.

(BAYLEN pulls out a tattered bunch of scraps of paper, held together by a string attached to the tiny nub of a pencil. He consults the paper.)

BAYLEN *(cont'd)*. Samson. Mildred ... Samson.

MARGOT. Huh. I don't know any Samson.

BAYLEN. Me neither. Anyway, like I said, one inch over and nothin', but this little goodie popped up and I held it up and tried to figure out what it was and I thought it would make a—

(Suddenly a baby cries from the smaller sleeping area. They both freeze. Beat.)

BAYLEN *(cont'd)*. Shit.

MARGOT. Shhhhh.

BAYLEN. I wasn't even—

MARGOT. Be quiet, can you be quiet?

(The crying intensifies. Beat.)

BAYLEN. Well, it doesn't matter now.

MARGOT. Baylen be—

BAYLEN. What's the difference?

MARGOT. Shut up!

(They both try to keep their voices down while the wailing goes on, but eventually give up and resume full voice over the constant screams.)

BAYLEN. Why are you so mad at me?

MARGOT. She was finally asleep.

BAYLEN. It's not like I was making all this—

MARGOT. It took hours, and she was finally—

BAYLEN. I mean, I should be able to talk to my wife for a minute—

MARGOT. Yes, but once she goes down, you have to—

BAYLEN. For a minute or two, I think I should be allowed to talk to my—

MARGOT. You don't have any idea what this is like.

BAYLEN. It's like this, Mar. This is what it's—

MARGOT. And you come in with your stories and try to get into my—

BAYLEN. I just want to talk to my wife, it's not so much to—

MARGOT. NOT WHILE SHE'S SLEEPING.

BAYLEN. It's my house, too, Mar.

MARGOT. Not when she's sleeping it's not.

BAYLEN. What the hell is that supposed to—

MARGOT. When she finally falls asleep, it's her house, Baylen. You're a guest. I'm a guest. If Christ himself walked in he'd be a guest. She's sleeping. It's her house.

BAYLEN. WELL, SHE'S NOT SLEEPING NOW, IS SHE?

(They face off for a long, tense beat. Finally, BAYLEN throws himself into a chair at the table.)

BAYLEN *(cont'd)*. All right.

MARGOT. What are you—

BAYLEN. It's her house, fine. FINE! I heard you.

(Beat.)

MARGOT. Two babies. Lucky me.

(MARGOT turns to head into the baby's curtained-off area.)

BAYLEN. OK. Good night.

MARGOT. TWO BABIES.

(She's gone, immediately trying to comfort their daughter.)

MARGOT *(cont'd, off)*. Shhh, shhh, shhh. Little one. Mama's here. Shhh.

(BAYLEN immediately deflates, regret pouring off him as he looks towards the baby's area.)

MARGOT *(cont'd, off)*. Shhh, shhh, shhh. Poor little girl. Poor little little one. Shhh. Shhh.

(As the crying starts to ease, and BAYLEN continues to look off to his unseen family, the lights fade. Transition.)

The graveyard. A bright, sunny day. Green grass. A hole. A pile of dirt. BAYLEN and GIZZER, another gravedigger, are sitting, eating their meager lunches.)

GIZZER. I mean, it was kind of a mess, what with the—

BAYLEN. Sounds like.

GIZZER. The two of 'em in the middle of the floor, everybody pushed off to the side like they were.

BAYLEN. And you didn't try to—

GIZZER. What was I s'posed to do? There were liberal amounts of alcohol involved and neither one was exactly, you know ...

BAYLEN. Right.

GIZZER. Fully conscious of the world in any immediate kind of sense, so ...

BAYLEN. You coulda stopped it, Gizz. Before the barstool went through the window, you could've—

GIZZER. But that was the best part.

BAYLEN (*continuous*). got between them or tried to talk some—

GIZZER. And it's not like I enjoyed it, not like it was some kind of—

BAYLEN. You enjoyed it. You know you did.

GIZZER. Yeah, but there's enjoying and there's just ... appreciating. Y'know? From a distance. Respectful-like.

BAYLEN. Uh-huh.

GIZZER. I'm not a farmyard beast, Bay.

BAYLEN. No, you're more of a wilderness type of creature.

GIZZER. That's right.

(They eat. Beat.)

BAYLEN. That wasn't a compliment, Gizzer.

GIZZER. It wasn't?

BAYLEN. No.

GIZZER. Oh.

(They eat. Beat.)

GIZZER (*cont'd*). Sounded like a compliment to me.

BAYLEN. Well, words are funny things. Sometimes they sound better than they mean to represent.

GIZZER. OK, don't get all—

BAYLEN. I'm just trying to point out, there's a big picture in every situation and you lose sight of it just for the sake of your—

GIZZER. Don't act like you've never—

BAYLEN. For the sake of your own enjoyment and you're no better than those in the middle of the mess.