

# QUEST THEATER

BONES IN THE  
BASEMENT

LORA  
GRAY



This book is dedicated to  
Clark, Olivia, Ingram, and Everett...  
the ones who help spark my creativity,  
both on paper and in life.

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**LORA GRAY**

**(An Excerpt: Act Four)**



## **ACT FOUR**

### **Stage Fright**

Over the next two weeks the children arrived at the old theater promptly at 3 o'clock every afternoon. They entered the front door, closed and locked it, turned on the light switches in the ticket booth and then found their way to the costume room where they entertained themselves without Grandpa's supervision. In fact, there had been several days during the two weeks that they had arrived and then left the theater without even seeing Grandpa.

They had rearranged many of the props, organizing them on the stage in one manner or the other, and had tried on what seemed like thousands of costumes. By the end of the second week, their interest had waned. Pearl sat on the platform that overlooked the sea of costumes, listening to music on her phone and studying the Driver's Education packet

she'd just received in the mail the day before. She stretched her back and yawned.

Bernie leaned against the wall chewing on a few pieces of gum, trying to blow the largest bubble possible. He'd gotten in the habit of bringing a snack with him to eat after school, but today he had woken up late and forgotten. He chewed on the gum, ignoring the familiar growl in his belly.

Oscar sat close to Pearl, slumped in boredom with his feet swinging over the side of the platform. He'd been thinking about Grandpa again and was growing agitated. He sighed then jumped down from the platform and began a slow stroll down one of the aisles of costumes.

"So where do you guys suppose Grandpa hangs out all the time?" Oscar asked as he perused the hanging racks.

Pearl didn't look up from her book. She spoke in an annoyed tone, "He said that he was working on the furnace. So he's down in the basement."

Bernie blew a bubble. Oscar peered at Pearl across the racks of clothes. "For two weeks? How long does it take to fix a furnace?"

Pearl ignored him.

"Don't you think it's weird that he never hangs out with us?" Oscar continued.

Pearl and Bernie both cut their eyes at Oscar. He was biting his lip and pinching his brow together. They could see that he was working himself up.

"Don't you think that we should tell Dad that he's not

really watching us? Don't you think that we should call Mom and tell her that we've been coming to this creepy place every day for the last two weeks and Grandpa only checks on us once or twice and then disappears? Don't you think..."

"Oscar, stop it!" Pearl said, pulling the buds from her ears and giving him a hard look. "You know we can't complain to Mom or Dad about grandpa. It would only stress them out, and the last thing they need is more stress from us."

Bernie blew another bubble and then found his feet. "Yeah, Oscar," he said, stretching his stiff back. "Besides, there's nothing to do at home either, we might as well be here."

Oscar slumped and then groaned. "What do you guys think Grandpa's really doing in the basement?"

Pearl closed her eyes and shook her head. "I think he's fixing the furnace, like he said."

Bernie got that look in his eyes. He prodded at his brother's fears. "Either that or.... maybe I was right about Grandpa and he's down there digging three deep, dark graves so he can bury us right alongside Grandma and Mr. Jones." Bernie thought for a moment. "At his age he can probably dig one grave a week and we've been hanging out here, what... two weeks? So, only one more week to go and he'll be ready for us!"

Pearl shot a disgusted look at Bernie and mouthed the words, "Shut up!"

He laughed. "I'm just kidding."

They both looked at Oscar. His face was white. He

swallowed hard.

Pearl sat her things aside and stood. She walked down the stairs and into the racks of costumes, glaring at Bernie the whole way. "I think we should change the subject!" She came to the end of a long rack and eyed several stacks of boxes. Each box was labeled. The box at the top of one stack had large black letters spelling out "¡Viva San Fermin! ¡Gora San Fermin!"

Her eyes brightened. She pulled the box from the stack and carried it to the landing.

"Come on Oscar, let's see what's in this box."

Oscar followed reluctantly. Pearl motioned for Bernie to come too. Bernie sighed and joined them.

"Look." She held up the box. "It's written in Spanish. Didn't you do a presentation on Spain in History class last year?"

Oscar nodded sheepishly. "Yeah."

She placed the box in front of him then opened the tattered flaps.

He peeked inside and Pearl and Bernie watched his expression change from fear to curiosity. Oscar reached into the box and pulled out a red scarf, a white shirt and a pair of white trousers.

He seemed confused. "I don't remember anything about red and white outfits when I did my presentation."

Bernie reached into the box and pulled out the pieces of another costume.

"Hey, Oscar," Bernie said in an unusually comforting

voice, "Let's put these things on and pretend that we're in Spain. You can tell me and Pearl everything we need to know."

Pearl shot Bernie a sarcastic look. *Oh, now you try to help!* Then she smiled at Oscar, agreeing with Bernie. They'd learned that if they gave Oscar some responsibility he usually had an easier time overcoming his anxieties.

Within minutes they were dressed in white from head to toe, baggy linen pants and shirts, with red sashes around their waists and red neckerchiefs hanging over their shoulders.

Bernie laughed and pointed at Oscar, who was cinching the red sash tightly around his loose waistband in an effort to keep his pants up. On their feet were woven cotton slippers. There were several more pieces of costumes in the box and Pearl riffled through them to make sure they hadn't missed anything. At the bottom of the box was a small black case that held a piece of jewelry and she pulled it out to look at it.

It was a long chain with a gold medallion hanging from it. On the medallion was the impression of an angry-looking bull. It wasn't very spectacular, probably just some sort of old costume jewelry. She reached over and put it around Oscar's neck. "There," she said. "Now you're complete." Oscar tried to smile.

Bernie had already run to the opposite end of the platform that led to the stage wing. "Come on, the town's all set up on the stage."

Before Bernie took the next step though, a glimmer of silver on the floor next to the base of the red curtain caught his



eye and he leaned down to examine it. When he saw what it was he grinned and completely forgot about Oscar telling them about Spain. It was Grandpa's key ring. He must have dropped it... and Bernie knew just what to do with it!

Pearl and Oscar ran to join Bernie but, by the time they reached the middle of the room, the straw sole of Oscar's cotton slipper caught on a loose floorboard and tore.

"Oh, no!" he cried out to Pearl. "What's Grandpa going to do when he sees this?"

Pearl examined the shoe. The entire sole had come loose. "Oscar, relax." Pearl pulled the shoe off of his foot. "He won't ever know if we don't tell him." She walked back to the box and looked inside for another shoe. There wasn't one, so she shrugged her shoulders and walked back to Oscar's side. "They're just cheap costume shoes anyway."

Oscar took a deep breath and tried to smile.

"Now come on." Pearl offered a hand to help him up. "Let's go out to the stage and I'll get Bernie to give you his shoes."

She pulled him to his feet and they made their way onto to the stage.

"Bernie!" Pearl called as they rounded the folds of the open curtain and stepped onto the stage. To their surprise though, Bernie was nowhere in sight. She looked down the length of the stage and into the orchestra pit. She called for him again but only heard the echo of her own voice.

"Hey... You guys!"

Pearl and Oscar could hear Bernie's voice calling to them.

"Up here," Bernie yelled.

Pearl gasped when she finally sighted Bernie. Oscar followed her shocked gaze and a look of disbelief crossed his face too. Bernie was waving at them from the projection room.

Oscar's voice began to tremble, "Oh, no, what's he doing? He's going to get us in big, big trouble."

Pearl took a step forward and called out calmly. "Bernie, what are you doing up there?"

"Pearl, be quiet! What if Grandpa hears you?" Oscar trembled.

Bernie grinned at her then looked down at the switchboard in front of him.

"How did you get in there?" Pearl called, trying to yell as quietly as she could.

Bernie ignored her. He was now standing at the locked box that he'd seen Grandpa's hand resting on when they had first found him in the projection room. The thought of the box had been gnawing at him since that first day. All he wanted to do was look inside and see why Grandpa kept a padlock on it.

He started in on the padlock with the ring of keys. The first three keys didn't fit.

"Bernie! Come back down here right now!" Pearl yelled at him from the stage.

He tried to insert four more keys into the lock with no success.

“Bernie, if I have to come up there and get you, you’ll be sorry!”

Three more keys and still no luck.

“I’m serious!” Pearl threatened. “If you get us in trouble I’m going to tell Dad and then you’ll really be sorry!”

Finally, click. The padlock opened.

He smiled down at Pearl. “I’ll be right there,” he yelled.

Pearl and Oscar both held their breath. *Good, he’s coming*, they thought. But as they watched him, they realized that he wasn’t coming.

“What’s he doing?” Oscar said in a panicked voice. “He said he was coming... What’s he doing?”

Pearl took another step forward, narrowing her eyes up at the projection room. *What’s he up to?* Then she realized, Bernie was fiddling with the light table. “Oh, no... Grandpa said never to touch those things.”

Inside the projection room, Bernie released the padlock and set it on the table. He slowly raised the hasp and opened the hinged wooden lid. He leaned forward to see what secret gem was hidden inside and his face grimaced with disappointment.

In the shadow of the box was a black metal dial, encircled by small tick-marks. It looked almost exactly like his mom’s kitchen timer.

“What?” Bernie sighed. “It’s just a stupid timer?”

He reached into the box and turned the dial. It clicked as it passed the first tick-mark, then the second. Bernie looked up

at the stage, nothing changed. He glanced around the theater hall. Everything was the same. No lights, no music, no props flying through the air on cables.

His shoulders sank. *What a weirdo*, Bernie thought about Grandpa. *This thing probably broke fifty years ago and instead of fixing it, he just put a dumb box over it.*

Bernie closed the lid and replaced the padlock.

"I'm only going to tell you one more time, Bernie Quest!" Pearl shouted again from the stage. "If you don't come down here right now I'm.... I'm going to go find Grandpa!"

Oscar hissed, "No!"

Bernie peered down at them. "I'm coming... I'm coming!" Then he disappeared from the window.

Pearl and Oscar exhaled deep sighs of relief.

"Good." Pearl turned to Oscar. "He really is coming this time."

Bernie turned away from the window, with intentions of leaving the projection room, when he noticed the massive projector. He reached out and touched it, enthralled by its many gears and levers. He touched the reel of film that balanced on the spindle of the machine. It turned slowly and he watched as the filmstrip uncurled itself a few feet. He picked up the end of the film and held it to the light, suddenly interested in which movie it was, and his siblings vanished from his mind yet again.

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With Bernie out of sight of the window, Pearl and

Oscar assumed he was on his way back to the stage. They turned their attention to the props and almost instantly there was a jolt from underfoot.

“What was that?” Oscar whispered.

Pearl had a look of surprise on her face as she gazed down at her feet. The stage was gently vibrating, shaking up tiny puffs of dust.

Pearl flashed a look at the projection room window. “What did Bernie do?”

The vibration built underfoot until it reached its peak and was released in another jolting pulse. Oscar’s knees buckled and he fell to the stage floor. Pearl stumbled to Oscar’s side. “What’s happening?” he asked Pearl in a panicked voice. She grabbed his hand and shook her head, looking blankly at him.

He struggled to his feet and held tightly to his sister’s arm. The pulses came more rhythmically now, each time with a hollow cracking sound echoing off of the high arched ceiling.

Pulse, pulse, pulse... then Pearl and Oscar realized that the hollow cracking sound wasn’t a crack at all, it was a tick. Tick, tick, tick, growing faster and louder with each jump of the stage-floor. The props on the stage jostled in place and one of the painted buildings behind them creaked and swayed before toppling forward. It fell with a muffled whomp that raised a cloud of dust, which filled the stage. The massive red curtains puffed out with the cloud and then swung back into place. The ticking continued.

Oscar gasped, "What's happening?"

Pearl yelled in the direction of the projection room window, "Bernie?!?!"

Bernie heard the ruckus and Pearl's voice calling to him, but was too interested in the movie strip to care what they were doing. He had pulled out several feet of film and was just now starting to recognize which movie it was.

Back on the stage, everything suddenly went still. For one tense moment, Pearl and Oscar held their breath. Then, as Oscar was whispering the words "Was that an earthqua...." one last tick rang through the theater and a blinding white spotlight shot them with an electrical charge.

Without releasing their locked arms, they grasped at their faces to protect their eyes. Oscar screamed.

Before his scream was complete, the blinding light changed and the air around them popped and tingled with chanting voices and high-pitched yowls.

**For more information:**

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