

Factory Treasure

By Amy Oestreicher

A full-length one-act based in the Lower East Side themed around prosperity. These plays chronicle the history of a now-abandoned sewing factory, and a family struggling to determine the best way to honor the legacy of the holocaust survivors who literally built an enterprise from scratch.

Jake, Marilyn and Steve have arranged to meet Betsy (Jake and Betsy's daughter) at her grandfather's abandoned factory to break the news: after collecting dust for decades, the defunct MYRA corporation will finally be sold to a developer and turned into condominiums. Betsy is devastated by this surprise, and struggles for a way to save it. What decision will be the most honorable way to keep her grandparents' legacy alive?

Betsy, influenced by the new "hipster culture" in Brooklyn, pleads with her mother to let her refurbish the old factory into a thrift shop, and revive her grandparents' memory by reimagining it. Jake insists that Betsy refuses to think practically, and it is eventually revealed that Marilyn was never taught to sew because of her own mother's secrets, locked away from surviving the death camps of Auschwitz. Betsy then reveals that she dropped out of college when struggling with her grandmother's death. The family realizes that these secrets may threaten to tear their own legacy apart, if they aren't brought to light. In the meantime, the factory papers still must be signed or destroyed. What is the most honorable decision for their future as a family and as a community?

The play begins and ends with the actual recordings of Irving Stochel, Betsy's grandfather, as an (optional) Prologue and Eulogy to the play, which are pantomimed scenes from Betsy's perspective. In the prologue, Betsy discovers her grandfather's tape cassette tucked away in a coat he made, where she learns all about his factory. In the eulogy, Betsy plays Irving's tapes once more, as she struggles to make a final decision, with the fate of the factory in one hand, and a handful of her grandfather's fabrics in the other.

Factory Treasure is based on the story of my grandparents, Holocaust survivors who went on to establish a thriving sewing corporation after coming to New York. You can read more about Hannah and Irving Stochel's amazing story in an article for [GLAMOUR Magazine](#).

Their story inspired my play, **FACTORY TREASURE**: a collective confrontation of how we view our past and what we choose to do with it.

Sample

BETSY You should've told me. Instead, you bring me to the factory for the very first time, wipe my stupid face in the floor, in their memories, put this all inside my head so I can never UN-see it, and then say, "Just Kidding! It's gonna be condos now!" How could you...

MARK It's your generation Betsy. you have this ideal view of things in the past, that they were so perfect, beautiful framed bits of hipster nostalgia, and you think making it all new is going to solve every problem in the world. Betsy, people need to eat, and real estate is real estate. That's why none of your friends have moved out of their parents' houses. (Sitting back down) It's because they don't know the value of a dollar anymore.

MARILYN Look at your father. He's tired. What we're trying to say is – what he – your father deserves to retire. He works like a dog. He doesn't sleep. I'm worried about him. I want to preserve Grandma and Grandpa's legacy, but I also want to preserve your father while he's still here.

MARK (trying to keep it together) And we'll give you some extra, outside of your loans, once you graduate.

BETSY You can't think straight because this place is a disaster. We just have to get it back on track and we'll be okay– some of the best vintage shops are around here – (looks around) We could – we could turn this space into a thrift shop.

MARK That's ridiculous! Look at this place!

BETSY "Thrift" means old, Dad. Hipsters would kill for the vintage vibe here.

MARK You're going to run a business by yourself? Because none of us are helping you.

MARILYN You have money now Betsy. When you were sixteen, you would have called us the coolest parents ever!

BETSY Before I actually valued the real things in life?

MARK That has nothing to do with you running a business. And I am not investing in your failure.

BETSY You guys raised me to follow my dreams. You also raised me thinking that school was everything that I would need to make decisions. Look around. People are starting businesses right out of high school. I only know if I have "life skills," if I try them out! Plus, Jamie will help me.

STEVE Who's Jamie?

MARILYN He was the one who goes to school with you?

BETSY Now Jamie goes by she.

MARK So that's what they're calling them these days, the trans – what you call it?

BETSY No Dad, just she. Jamie's a she. It's nothing complicated.

MARK I'm not here to discuss politics. Whatever your friend wants to do is fine. I'm just saying that you and SHE can't run a factory when you haven't even graduated yet. You barely have time to take care of yourself - your studies.

BETSY So sorry. Hard to concentrate with my grandparents rolling around in their graves. Someone has to fight for what they can't!

MARK You want to take charge but you can't even arrive on time.

BETSY We need this neighborhood. Our home is this neighborhood. Your childhood is this neighborhood – you can't just stop here! Are you going to be the generation that ruined it all? Most everybody is happy to sell cheap and get out – sure! Are you going to let a corporation buy a property? Grandpa built this factory! People kill for legacies like that!

MARILYN And Grandpa would be thrilled with your father's decision. (getting worked up) He's doing this for you! And retirement.

BETSY Retirement. (shouting even louder, taking back paper) Why is Dad's retirement more important than their memory?

MARK My retirement? You ungrateful little - ALL of you! I did this to take care of YOU! Your grandparents made the decisions they made because they wanted to provide for the family, which is exactly what we are doing right now. What I'm doing! Not because they were sentimental about cloth.

BETSY (sudden force) Cloth!?! That's all that's left!

MARILYN (peacemaking) You'll always have their clothes.

MARK (Flabbergasted) And the money! We're giving you the money!

BETSY I don't WANT the money! I'm not selling my soul - or theirs - to live your corporate American Dream! THIS was the original American dream. That's why Grandma almost died on a shitty immigrant ship to get here! Sell this factory and you give up all of that.

MARILYN It's a space, Betsy. And there's more to keeping Grandma's memory together than a needle. Than sewing. After the war, it didn't make Grandma as happy as you think.

STEVE (challenging MARILYN) You crazy? I came to the factory – I saw how proud Dad was of all of this. This was – in its day, before it was all burnt out, this place was alive. It was like their promised land – the only sacred thing when our folks were trying to get over the Holocaust and make something of themselves! (Suddenly vulnerable) I worked here!

MARILYN Work! You brought him corned beef sandwiches - you didn't work with him.

MARK You haven't worked a day in your life.

STEVE So this is how it's gonna be, huh Mar? I get it – Steve. Stevie. The kid clown as always. (suddenly taking control) Well you know what? I have the papers!

MARILYN Don't turn this around now.

STEVE (Waving the papers) What? Turning my back on y'all? Don't like the taste of your own medicine?

MARILYN Really? You're bringing Stonybrook into this now?

STEVE I'm just saying that things changed when you left for school.

MARILYN You can't blame the neighborhood changing on me going to college!

STEVE It was more than that, Marilyn! Canal Street went to shit and Mom was on the couch depressed every day. I had to keep the books.

MARK And that's why we invited you!

STEVE For the books? Well, some of us married into a multimillion dollar inheritance. (MARK winces) Some of us earned it by blood. (putting papers in his briefcase) At the end of the day, I'll always have the papers!

MARILYN (snatching papers back) You have the papers because you picked them up in midtown as a favor! If I had auditioned in Times Square every day, I'd pick them up instead!

STEVE But Marilyn, that's how it always goes right? Ask Stevie for this and that, gallop off to school and fall off the face of the earth until the next deed. You were lucky to leave here when you did. Everything changed, and then the business fell apart in the eighties. Mom and Dad were never the same. Someone had to be the clown. (With an edge) Sis.

MARILYN And someone had to wipe Mom's tears when we were walking down the street and kids were throwing shoes at her for having an accent – and you were in diapers!

BETSY (stepping in) Her mother is the only conscience keeping everyone from making an idiot decision!

MARK Her mother is the reason why we can pay for your tuition now!

BETSY Tell that to Grandma and Grandpa when you go to Temple and say mourners' Kaddish for them. That's a big lie of a prayer you're telling.

MARK (clearly burned) Don't you dare tell me what I pray for.

BETSY You're right! You probably don't even pray at all – why should you care? They're not YOUR parents!

MARILYN Betsy!

BETSY I'm staying with family. (Drops to the floor, and sprawls herself on the ground, dramatically in protest)

MARILYN Betsy get off the floor, it's filthy.

MARK Screw ME. (bursting up from table)

MARILYN You, MARK? You!????

MARK Screw ME.

MARK storms offstage

MARILYN Where are you going?

MARK A WALK!!!

MARILYN (suddenly becoming strong) You will NOT leave here with your pride, Mark! You will not leave here nobly thinking you wanted to make the best decision for our family, that I was the blonde bimbo idiot that God forbid, daughter of Holocaust survivors, feels a little guilt in this! And you are the hero saving us from debt! I will NOT let you tell that story to yourself!

STEVE Oh stop, Mar.

MARILYN No, you, Steven! I'm trying to help! And Betsy, dammit, I'm trying to let your father retire!

BETSY (with coat over her head) So you're giving me this whole sob story about the "China Men" making MY grandfather lose his business when they started their own plant, and now China Vanke Co. is buying him out?

STEVE (musing) See? SHE gets the irony. (beat) If they were th-

MARK No one is buying us out! You're coming into a pile of money!

STEVE Poppa's right, Bets. I know you don't care about condos, but you do care about your next meal. Or date. Or whatever. OK - I do. It means we can all live more comfortably/

MARILYN (speaking to her coat-covered daughter on the floor) /and pay off your student debt. Daddy and I admire your work ethic, Betsy. You're amazing. Your father always tears up when he tells people you'll be graduating with honors from his Alma Mater! You know how proud Grandma would be that a third-generation child is getting a proper education? (Getting on the floor next to Betsy) Grandma never went to school and she was so smart. You and Mommy both could do anything you put your mind to!

STEVE That's why this factory was everything it was in its prime. Smarts. Runs in the family. (gives MARK teasing look)

MARK (ignoring STEVE) Betsy, get off the floor. Both of you.

STEVE It's what they do these days. Like our peace protests, without the drugs. (aside to MARK and MARILYN) Why don't you two get some air.

MARILYN No! We/

STEVE /Mar – you need air. Trust me.

MARILYN (getting up) She'll come around.

STEVE Wake up Mar. She's a kid. Someone needs to school her. Kid's too young to care whether her parents retire. But she might care that her parents were trying to take care of HER. Maybe we all would've done better...if FAMILY was there to take care of us when we needed them...

MARK Not the time, Steve. (Gesturing MARILYN ahead of him)

MARILYN reluctantly leaves, MARK follows, shooting STEVE a warning look.

Silence. BETSY remains on floor.

STEVE (With a new, fatherly authority) Get up Betsy. (Pause. BETSY doesn't move) I don't think it's occurred to your hipster-induced brain that your parents thought you could do more with a chunk of cash than bedazzle up a dilapidated empty factory? Wake up, Bets. They were trying to do right by you. You're more than putting candles in mason jars and hosting open poetry slams in a/

BETSY (fires back, still on floor) /See how this all turned? For money! (covers herself further in coat)

STEVE A lot of good can come from money. Not just for your old man.

BETSY (from under coat) If I wanted good, I'd give it to cancer! And YES I said that! They're selling my life!

STEVE You're getting better life, Betsy. You're inheriting. You're inheriting their prosperity. You want the power? (points all around her) Here's the money. Do something meaningful with it. Anyone can run a store for rags.

BETSY (peeking out from coat) It's not just that. It's their story. It's their story much more up close than a stupid fourth grade Holocaust unit.

STEVE There's whole museums for that! Donate it to the Tenement Museum - somewhere on the L.E.S. where your grandma would've been. They'd plotz to have real immigrant blood, sweat, real stories...I dunno. Plenty of historic places you can google.

BETSY I don't know.

STEVE You do know. That's why you're not fighting me.

BETSY is quiet, hiding in coat a bit deeper.

STEVE C'mon schmendrick. Here's a hand – it's clean. (STEVE helps BETSY up. They hear a quiet recorded voice in the distance) Mar? I hear your "Siri." You can come out from behind the door now.

MARILYN (re-entering furious, as though she's been holding a breath she's been waiting to exhale) Betsy, I realize that if you met your father today or in the past decade you might not like him. But considering you've known him since you came into this world, I would like you to show him love.

BETSY I don't need you to protect me.

MARK You don't need anyone to protect you but you do need someone to pay your rent when you can't afford it anymore because your hippie dreams go down the drain.

MARILYN (trying another approach) You're so close to graduating honey. We just want you to stay on track. This money is for you. It's the best of both worlds. You're an adult, right? Prove it. Take the money, and make a choice. There are so many ways you can honor her memory. It's your decision sweetie - that's all you have to focus on, and graduating. And I promise, Grandma will be so proud of whatever you decide.

BETSY (Looking down at coat in her hands) She's not proud.

MARILYN Of course she is. Why would you say that?

BETSY (quieter) I asked her and she told me.

MARILYN In your dreams, Sweetie? (touched) When did you dream about Grandma?

BETSY I don't know. A week ago. Or two.

MARILYN (reaching out to hold her) And when would she ever say she'd be disappointed in you?

BETSY (still staring down) When I told her I dropped out of school.

Quiet.

MARILYN What, sweetie?

BETSY I left. I left school.

MARK What do you mean by that.

BETSY I failed. I failed out this term. Okay. I failed.

MARILYN What happened?

BETSY I was having a hard time.

MARK When were you planning on telling us?

BETSY (facing them both) When you noticed? When I was so depressed I couldn't get out of bed? When you didn't even tell me when the funeral was because you thought for some reason my exams were more important?

MARILYN Sweetie, if I knew that it meant -

BETSY Of course it meant something! Why should I go for any of your B.S. "holier-than-thou-honor-herghostly-legacy" garbage, when you wouldn't even let me come to the service?

STEVE It was just a service, Betsy. It wasn't her.

BETSY Right. And this is just a factory. And Grandma's just dead. And all this is just one big casino, right?

MARK That's not what -

BETSY Well it is to me! And I couldn't bounce back okay? I couldn't just wake up the next day and say, "Alrighty, let's renovate her life's work into condominiums and go on a cruise!" I FELT it! And no funeral, no nothing! I never got to cry. I was a zombie! I couldn't focus on anything. (looking at MARK earnestly) How could you expect me to finish a term?

MARILYN (overwhelmed, welling up) I'm...sorry.

BETSY Mom, Don't cry! This all makes sense now! I was meant to fail out.

MARILYN What? MARK If I would have known....

BETSY (convinced) It's perfect. This is what Grandma wanted. Someone to revive all this – you have any idea what I could do with the space? The fabrics? Plus, everyone's starting businesses now.

STEVE Bets, it was successful when it was here, and now it's finished. Let it go, K? We've still gotta eat. I've gotta eat.

MARK You are not giving up a degree to sell shirts with emotion-cons and gibberish acronyms.

BETSY I don't have to! I'll learn to sew. If they can learn in the factories, then so can I!

MARK (Reaching his threshold) I'm done. I'm making my dinner reservations. Join if you'd like.

MARILYN. (scolding BETSY) I am not just going to hear you dropped out of college and not do anything about it. You are NOT going to learn to sew instead of getting an education for yourself! (with an abnormal amount of emotion)

STEVE Sis, relax.

MARILYN She wouldn't let me! Mommy said she'd never teach her daughter to do what she had to survive. I raised you to learn the best for yourself, not pick up a trade to survive.

BETSY (taken aback, seeing her mother is affected) Mom...relax. I'm just talking sewing. Everyone does it here – you saw the boutiques. And you said it too – her memories are in the fabric.

MARILYN (poignantly reflecting) It wasn't all good memories. She sewed to eat, but she didn't even like to talk about it. She'd talk about bread, pieces of bread, having it stolen, she said there were all kinds of people in the camp – good, bad, generous, they lived off of potato peels. How the only reason she survived...was being forced by the Nazis to sew their uniforms. (looks at fabric again) Bets – all that comes up in the fabric. It's not just the good things. (now certain) Grandma would have wanted you to start fresh.

MARK (Comforting his wife and daughter with assurance) A day like today – with dollars in our hands so we don't have to work our lives away – so we can work for what's important – that's how she'd want to be remembered.

MARILYN I know you want something to remember that's hers. And it's in the learning – learning something for yourself. Mommy taught me how to cook, bake, do my multiplication tables, but wouldn't let me pick up a needle. (looks at BETSY) Please Betsy, go back to school.

BETSY (looking straight back) That makes no sense.

MARK What makes no sense? You dropped out of college on a whim.

BETSY Grandma would've wanted us to remember!

MARILYN She told us what she wanted us to remember!

BETSY Well if she were my mom, I would have asked more questions.