Thunder Above, Deeps Below

by A. Rey Pamatmat

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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***THUNDER ABOVE, DEEPS BELOW* was supported by the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center during a residency at the National Playwrights Conference of 2008.**

***THUNDER ABOVE, DEEPS BELOW* received its World Premiere production with Second Generation; Gladys Chen, President; Lloyd Suh, Artistic Director.**

THUNDER ABOVE, DEEPS BELOW received its world premiere production in 2009 by Second Generation at the TBG Theater. It was directed by Pat Diamond; the set was by Sandra Goldmark; the costume design was by Camille Assaf; the lighting design was by Scott Bolman; the sound design was by The Broken Chord Collective; the production stage manager was Lyndsey Goode; and the assistant stage manager was Danielle Buccino. The cast was as follows:

PERRY . . . . . Darian Dauchan
THERESA. . . . . Maureen Sebastian
GIL . . . . . Jon Norman Schneider
HECTOR . . . . . Rey Lucas
MARISOL/BOATWOMAN . . . . . Phyllis Johnson
MR. LOCKE/PRINCE . . . . . Rafael Jordan

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

PERRY, 19, African-American, a business student who assists with the books at his family's tire shop, the Prince of Tires

THERESA, 19, Filipino-American, a homeless woman

GIL, 24, Filipina, a homeless transsexual

HECTOR, 17, Puerto Rican-American, a homeless prostitute

MARISOL, 24, Dominican-American, assistant manager at a chain doughnut shop, possibly a sorceress of some kind

with...

BOATWOMAN, ageless (to be played by the actor playing Marisol)

MR. LOCKE, late 30's, and **THE PRINCE**, early 20's, African-American and Iranian (two men in different disguises to be played by one actor)

SETTING

Chicago, various locations

TIME

Now

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Thunder Above, Deeps Below is conceived as taking place on a stage with three levels: one on the surface of the stage, one high above it, and one midway between the two. The director and designers should feel free to do it with platforms, do it with stairs, or to re-interpret it entirely and not do it at all.

Intermission should be taken at the end of Act II, with The Other Act, Scene 3 opening the second half.

While not directly adapting any source, the playwright owes considerable creative debt to Pericles, Prince of Tyre by William Shakespeare, the photographs of Philip-Lorca diCorcia (particularly "Alice. 1988" and "Tim. 1990"), and a barista who worked in the Barnes & Noble Astor Place café from at least 1994-1996, perhaps even longer.

He, doing so, put forth to seas,
Where when men been, there's seldom ease;
For now the wind begins to blow;
Thunder above and deeps below…

– William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre,* Act I, Scene 4

The Other Act: Resurrection
Scene One

*(***PERRY** *alone, high above the stage.)*

PERRY. I stepped into the water and I felt her kiss my toe.

My little girl Azure loves the water. Even brisk Lake Michigan water – cold nine months out of each year. I brought her to the Lake this last April Saturday, when the water still isn't quite right and chills you to the core. A deep chill to stop your heart and set your spirit free. But Azure's spirit is already so free – she ran right in; leapt in with a squeal before I even knew what she was up to. I charged after her, visions of drowning, hypothermia, pneumonia – or at least bronchitis, a head cold, a toe cut on a sharp stone – speeding through my head. And as I ran into the Lake – even with my daughter's life in the balance and despite the sharp stab of April water – all I felt when I plunged in was a kiss, *her* kiss on my toe.

(The light ripples a watery kiss.)

And now I need to leave my daughter and the quiet western shores of Michigan and cross the lake to the bustling eastern shores of Illinois, because now I know that she is on the other side.

Please…will you help me?

(Lights rise on a hooded **BOATWOMAN** *midway above the stage. The sound of waves. A low rumble of thunder.)*

End of Scene

Act I: Confession
Scene One

(On the other side.)

*(***THERESA** *and* **GIL** *sit on a curb.* **THERESA** *holds a coffee cup from a chain doughnut shop, "Dippin' Do's."* **GIL** *holds a cardboard sign that says: "Money for silicone. Help a girl realize his dream.")*

*(***THERESA** *shakes the cup; coins slide around and jingle.)*

GIL. Spare some change?

*(***HECTOR** *enters, flirting with a young woman he sees in the vicinity of the audience.)*

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* Hey, shorty.

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

GIL. Sir? Spare some?

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* Girl, what you want?

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

(into the audience) I got it.

GIL. Sir, some change, please? Some change?

(Shake/slide/jingle. **HECTOR***'s "shorty" moves on.)*

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* Oh, come on, baby, come on.

(Shorty is gone.)

(to **GIL***)* What the hell is that sign?

GIL. I don't even get a hello, *papi*?

HECTOR. Hi, *papi*.

GIL. *Ay papi*!

HECTOR. How you expect to get breakfast with that stupid-ass sign scaring everyone away?

GIL. You're stupid.

HECTOR. Don't make me blow up your spot, yo. That chicks-with-dicks stuff scares people.

GIL. Good thing I plan on getting my dick cut off, too, then.

HECTOR. Oh, oh, oh shit, yo. Oh, no man! Keep it to yourself.

THERESA. Let him have his fun.

HECTOR. What we got?

THERESA. Buck-fifty. It's Monday.

GIL. Everyone spent all their money.

THERESA. On beers.

GIL. Drugs.

THERESA. Horses.

GIL. Whores.

HECTOR. And it's a good thing they did.

*(***HECTOR** *produces a small wad of cash.)*

GIL. *Jesu-Maria-Josep.* It's like Santa Slut.

HECTOR. Stop with the slut.

GIL. You just called yourself a whore.

HECTOR. It was a joke.

GIL. So this money is a joke? You blew that big-dicked man for fun?

HECTOR. Shut your cock-sucking mouth.

GIL. *Bakla puto.*

HECTOR. *(to* **THERESA***)* What did he call me?

GIL. *Maricon puto.* How's that? *Puta.*

HECTOR. I'm no queer, wonderbra.

GIL. Faggot whore. Maybe not a faggot but a faggot whore.

HECTOR. Yeah, well unless that mouth wants to wrap itself around more than some tasty dick meat today, you best behave.

GIL. "You best behave. 'Sup? 'Sup? Yo, yo, yo." I don't do that homeboy shit.

HECTOR. Then maybe I should spend my green on my homeboys.

GIL. So they can beat your skinny *puta* ass?

THERESA. Guys. *(to* **HECTOR***)* I guess he wanted a quickie before work.

HECTOR. Naw. She's away. Drove with the kids to her parents in Pennsylvania or some shit. Who the hell is from Pennsylvania? I spent the night.

THERESA. You should rethink your pricing structure if that's all you got for a whole night.

HECTOR. That's all I got for breakfast. Lunch, dinner, comics…that's coming out of here.

*(***HECTOR** *produces another wad of cash.)*

GIL. God bless your cock-sucking mouth!

*(***GIL** *takes the breakfast money and runs offstage [into the Dippin' Do's].)*

THERESA. Starting to sound serious.

HECTOR. What's serious? I served him. He paid me.

THERESA. Overnight. In his home. He could set you up. Get you a place.

HECTOR. He ain't gettin' me no place, a-ight?

THERESA. You can get more. You are deeply involved in his life –

HECTOR. Deeply what? He's some queer ass boyfucker, you know? I'm keeping us fed. And this is how I do it. This is how we get fed.

THERESA. I'm just saying: he gets you a place, you'd be set up, and we'd have a place to keep the stash till it's time to go. That's what's important: getting to San Francisco. Don't let whatever you feel get in the way of that.

HECTOR. 'Cause you sure as hell won't. What's with you today?

THERESA. We crashed at that squat on Clark, so I didn't sleep too well. All kinds of people there high and fucked up on so much shit I was hallucinating.

HECTOR. Let's go to a shelter tonight or some hotel.

THERESA. No, save it for food. It's warm out these days.

HECTOR. Yeah, and I'm getting comics.

THERESA. Jesus –

HECTOR. It's my money. Gil and I, we're buying comics, a-ight?

THERESA. Fine, fine.

HECTOR. He's maybe going to call me later, anyway. Wifey's pops is sick or something, so she and the kids are hanging with him till the end. Shug'd be there, too, but his job ties him down. And, you know, sometimes I do, too.

THERESA. Make sure you get more cash for that.

HECTOR. Yo, I don't need no bitch pimp, a-ight?

THERESA. We've got to be ready to go, and I feel like something is…something.

HECTOR. I feel you: you're worried, because we ain't made it yet. That's some smart shit. But I'm telling you, we ain't freezing our asses off this year. We are mos' def' going out west.

*(***GIL** *enters with a Dippin' Do's bag and a cardboard coffee carrier with three cups.)*

Chow down, ladies. *Papi* is bringing home the bacon.

GIL. Bringing home the bacon, beating the meat, same difference.

HECTOR. Gil –

GIL. Choking the chicken, chomping a bone.

HECTOR. Hey, just 'cause you want a piece of this –

GIL. No, even one piece of that skanky shit is too much for me –

THERESA. You guys! Please!

GIL. She's cranky.

HECTOR. Seriously.

THERESA. GIL, LAY OFF.

GIL. *(different subject)* What are we getting today?

HECTOR. We could get lotsa different shit.

GIL. No. X-Men.

HECTOR. Yeah, yeah. That shit is crazy, with the White Queen –

GIL. No, no. The classics. I don't want crazy science fiction crap. I want classic superhero fun. Let's get a graphic novel, ha? More bang for your banging.

THERESA. You're all about heading west, and then you blow your cash on stupid comic books.

HECTOR. Yo, step off.

GIL. They're not stupid.

THERESA. They're not Shakespeare. It's a waste.

GIL. It's not your money.

THERESA. It's not yours either.

GIL. Sometimes it is.

THERESA. It's always Hector's money. Your money is for your surgery.

HECTOR. And medical dick-chopping is better than spending it on comics?

THERESA. It's a goal. For the future.

HECTOR. What future?

GIL. The future where I am fabulous.

HECTOR. You want I should be adding to my college fund or some shit? Mind my taxes? This is what we got, Trese: eat, sleep, shit, repeat. Reality. Or escape. And sometimes I use my reality to get some escape. So whatever bug crawled all up in your cunt, you best be poppin' it out, 'fore I pop you. Come on, baby baby, squeeze. Squeeze that baby back out!

THERESA. I want a real escape. From cold enveloping this town, from sleeping on trains, and from frost creeping inside my shoes and sticking to my feet.

HECTOR. What's it matter to you? You already the ice queen.

GIL. I lost my job. She's all bitch of the year, because I lost my job.

THERESA. Lost isn't exacly –

GIL. I quit it. But I had to. Nat was beating up one of the other telemarketers again, and I couldn't take it.

HECTOR. You'll get a new one.

GIL. I already have something lined up.

(to **THERESA***)* So stop going crazy over where we spend Hector's money.

THERESA. I'm going crazy over where we're getting your money.

HECTOR. What's the job?

THERESA. He's not taking it.

GIL. I'm going back to the club.

THERESA. That guy that –

GIL. Is long gone.

HECTOR. If he wants to go, let him. And if anyone messes with my boy –

GIL. Girl.

HECTOR. I'll take care of it.

THERESA. Because that worked out real well last time.

(to **GIL***)* You can't even make real money there without turning tricks.

GIL. I made it all the way from the Philippines without giving up my pow-pow for pesos.

THERESA. Well, now's a great time to start!

HECTOR. You got problems about turning tricks?

THERESA. You can take care of yourself.

GIL. First of all, that man was not a trick. He was a poor dating decision, okay? Second, I got away. He didn't rape me, did he? Third, just because it happened while I was working at the club, doesn't mean it happened because of the club.

THERESA. So explain why you quit in the first place.

GIL. I was confused, and now I'm not. And we need the money. Just because you're in charge of the stash doesn't mean we have no clue how much is there, okay? If I don't work, we're not getting out of here before the cold hits. At least, not together.

THERESA. If you end up dead in some alley, we don't go together either.

HECTOR. We go together, or we ain't going.

GIL. I didn't know you cared, Theresa.

THERESA. I don't. You made a lot of money at the telemarketing place.

(Lights change.)

*(***PERRY** *enters high above the stage. He wears no shoes and his pants are rolled up to his mid-calves. He step-drags his feet, and as he does we hear the sound of water.* **PERRY** *crosses the space and disappears.)*

(Lights change.)

HECTOR. Yo, Trese?

THERESA. Yes, I…I'm okay.

GIL. You're shaking.

THERESA. Something is… Is something – ?

*(***MARISOL** *enters from the direction of the Dippin' Do's. She wears a cheap, worn out uniform that should be cute and a severe expression. She stands tall, crosses her arms and shoots daggers at the trio.)*

MARISOL. Move down.

HECTOR. Here we go.

MARISOL. How many mornings do I have to tell you to move your asses down the block?

HECTOR. We're paying customers today.

MARISOL. Then next time you buy food, you come sit inside.

HECTOR. *¿Quieres que me venga adentro? ¿Es eso lo que quieres, mami?*

MARISOL. *No empiezes.*

HECTOR. Well, we can't collect no change in there.

MARISOL. You can't *solicit* out here, either.

GIL. Sweetie, we aren't scaring anyone away. Besides, they love us. They come here every morning expecting coffee with more buzz than crack cocaine and sweet smiles from our angelic faces.

MARISOL. The manager has been riding my ass, and he's here in half an hour.

THERESA. Let's do what the lady says.

HECTOR. Why? She don't give a shit about us.

MARISOL. You think you're too old for me to spank you, Hector?

HECTOR. Yo, I'm grown. You don't gots to watch the neighbor kid no more.

MARISOL. But I will and I got eyes in the back of my head –

HECTOR. "And old magic running through my veins!" Yeah, I remember.

MARISOL. Look: George is only coming for a half shift. You guys move on now, and I'll give you first pick of the afternoon leftovers before the shelter comes for them.

THERESA. Come on, guys. Up, up. Go to the park. Come on! Up!

(They notice **THERESA** *lingering behind.)*

HECTOR. What are you going to do?

THERESA. I'll catch up with you. Go.

*(***HECTOR** *and* **GIL** *reluctantly obey and walk off.)*

Marisol, do you have a minute?

MARISOL. Not to loiter out here. Come inside.

*(***THERESA** *and* **MARISOL** *head for the Dippin' Do's.)*

End of Scene

Act I: Scene Two

*(***MARISOL** *grabs a coffee pot and suddenly they are in the doughnut shop.* **THERESA** *sits at a table with a cup of coffee. She reveals a wad of cash.)*

THERESA. Sixty dollars legal tender.

MARISOL. Quite a take.

THERESA. An overnight. He's starting to do overnights.

MARISOL. Poor kid.

THERESA. Not for long. I told him to raise his rates.

MARISOL. When his dad ran out, we all looked out for him. But you can only do so much. One time I bought him school clothes? The very next day his mom sold them for smack.

THERESA. Jesus.

MARISOL. So there are some cracks in your heart of stone.

THERESA. One or two.

MARISOL. How do you feel about Hector's overnights?

THERESA. Hector is taking care of himself.

MARISOL. But don't you wonder what it's like for him? Behind closed doors, we can only guess what happens.

THERESA. What I wonder doesn't – look, take it or don't take it. I'll worry about what I think.

MARISOL. Coffee?

(Before **THERESA** *can answer,* **MARISOL** *freshens her cup. She waves her hand over the cup with a flourish.)*

They don't mind that you –

THERESA. They don't know. They work, I panhandle and take care of the stash so no one can give it up. But it's too much to risk now. You have a safe here, you could put it there.

MARISOL. How much?

THERESA. One-oh-five, so far.

MARISOL. And what's the money for?

THERESA. Three bus tickets to San Francisco.

MARISOL. Finally ready to move on?

THERESA. I'm always ready. It's just now I have the means, if Hector and Gil don't fuck it up. You know, you could start paying us.

MARISOL. For what, exactly?

THERESA. We're like advertising. Sitting out there with the cups. Every time people spot us change they get a good look at the Dippin' Do's logo. They see the cup and think, "I could go for a cruller. An eclair." Or something.

MARISOL. Once you got some statistics to back that up, I'll tell George to figure out a fee.

THERESA. Sounds like he's still giving you a hard time.

MARISOL. He'll probably give me an even harder time if he finds a hundred and five extra dollars in the safe.

THERESA. He can't hold anything against you. You practically do his job for him.

MARISOL. He may make me miserable, but it's a good arrangement. I cover for him, he gives me extra paid time off. I can pick Manny up from school twice a week and spend more weekends with him. Raising my baby alone, it makes a difference, you know?

THERESA. Sure…I mean, I guess I don't…

*(***THERESA** *is distracted. She stares into space.)*

MARISOL. Theresa? You okay?

*(***THERESA** *sips her coffee.)*

THERESA. I just remembered a dream I had last night. A man waiting at the edge of the water. And this pressure on my lips like a fish swimming against my mouth. Wiggling or something. I remember…It's hard to put it all together.

MARISOL. My grandmother read dreams. A regular *bruja*, that one. Water is good. It means you're getting in touch with your deeper soul. Fishes, though. All I know about fishes is they smell bad.

THERESA. It doesn't matter. With Gil at the club again, anything could happen. If he ends up hurt and Hector ends up in juvie or with his mom, at least I'll know the cash is safe. That the whole plan won't be lost.

MARISOL. Don't you care about them at all?

THERESA. I'm not freezing out here this winter. Just take care of the money for me. For us.

MARISOL. I wonder sometimes how you ended up where you are. Did you choose this life?

THERESA. Your life is no better than mine –

MARISOL. Maybe it is, or maybe it isn't. You want to find out?

*(***MARISOL** *goes behind the counter and returns with a piece of paper that she sets in front of* **THERESA**.*)*

THERESA. I don't need –

MARISOL. Things open up in here. I could help you. Choose something – someone else to be.

*(***THERESA** *shoves the money back in her pocket.)*

THERESA. Who I am…That's for me to know. What we do, where we go, we'll take care of it. We can take care of ourselves.

MARISOL. Theresa, take the application.

THERESA. I'm going west.

MARISOL. Take the application and give me your stash.

*(***THERESA** *gives* **MARISOL** *the money and takes the application. She turns to leave.)*

(Lights change…)

(…as **MARISOL** *holds up a closed fist.* **THERESA** *freezes where she stands.)*

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe you didn't choose this life. But now I'm giving you a chance to choose it or something else. You have a choice.

*(***MARISOL** *opens her fist and lights return to normal.* **THERESA** *exits.)*

End of Scene

Act I: Scene Three

(Late night on the waterfront. **HECTOR** *sleeps, clutching a graphic novel, like "X-Men: From the Ashes."* **THERESA** *and* **GIL** *sit with the distant sound of Lakeshore Drive behind them. Much closer, waves lap quietly against the embankment.)*

THERESA. Water. And a kiss. I don't think it was a fish anymore. But something pressed against my lips. Something alive, but probably not a fish.

GIL. Listen to you, talking to that witch about your dreams. I didn't think you believed in magic.

THERESA. I don't.

GIL. You should. Our country was created by magic.

THERESA. Your country.

GIL. One bird got sick of flying between Sea and Sky, so she started a fight between them. The bird dodged as they hurled stones at each other, until piles of pulverized rock covered the earth – rising out of the Sea, cutting into the Sky. And then that clever little bitch, proud of the magic she invoked, rested her wings and sat her ass down on the first land: the Philippine archipelago.

THERESA. You've got to be shitting me.

GIL. Your parents never told you this story?

THERESA. Maybe when I was five. Even then I would have told them to go fuck themselves.

GIL. Do you know how I came to the States?

THERESA. MAGIC. You caught a chicken for dinner and squeezed a genie out of it's ass who granted you one wish. And you said: "I want to be in America!"

GIL. How do you spell "Theresa"? L - I - L - B - I - T - C - H.

THERESA. R - E - A - L - I - S - T.

GIL. Well, there was no genie, but it was magic. Gilbert Corazón was training to be a computer networking specialist. Even in high school she could hack the Philippine government's network. But when Gilbert's

father caught her modelling dresses from Mrs. Corazón's closet for her boyfriend that life ended.

And with nothing but the dress on her back, Gilbert was on the streets of Manila. Until she started a new life through an agency that sent young ladies to the Middle East to work as housekeepers. Six months later, Gilbert was in Iran cleaning up after a wealthy family's oldest son.

(The **PRINCE** *appears high above the stage in thobe and keffiyeh.)*

THERESA. You never went to Iran.

GIL. That is how I began to work for my Prince three years ago – my distant cousin to princes, really. He was a beautiful young man with a face as smooth as mine. Two years younger than me and a poet. He was very curious about the world, and that's why we moved to America.

My Prince enrolled in the comparative literature department at Northwestern University. I came along to Evanston, Illinois – just me and him in his private condo. At this point, I still wore the hijab – the veil – to ensure he would only see my true gender and not the one my organs deceive people into believing I am. Then, one day, my Prince said:

PRINCE. You don't have to wear the hijab here. Not at all.

GIL. And because I wanted to be known as female not because of the robe, but because of my shapely hips, my supple legs, my cascade of rippling black hair…

THERESA. Okay, okay, I got it.

GIL. …I began wearing the uniform the agency provided. Until my Prince said to me:

PRINCE. You don't have to wear a uniform here. Not at all. Why don't we get you some proper clothes?

GIL. And soon I had a modest wardrobe to bring him coffee in elegant, but practical skirts. To chat with him in blouses dark enough to hide stains or light enough to tolerate bleaching. To slip out in a pink robe and

pull a blanket over him when he fell asleep on the couch. Until my Prince said to me:

PRINCE. You don't have to wear a skirt here. Not at all.

GIL. I want to wear a skirt.

PRINCE. I only mean you should not pretend to be something you may not want to be, just to be my servant. My servant does not have to be a maid. My servant can be my man.

GIL. Can your man be your woman?

PRINCE. My man can be what she wishes. As long as she wants to be mine.

GIL. And then, I leaned in to him, and I kissed him.

THERESA. This is made up.

GIL. *Jesu-Maria-Josep!* How else would you explain a transsexual Filipina computer networking specialist ending up on the streets of Chicago?

THERESA. You've never told me this story before.

GIL. You've never needed it before. There is no more powerful magic than a true story told at the proper time. The right story can save a life, reveal a trickster, or reunite lovers.

THERESA. If you have a Prince, I think you'd have introduced us by now.

GIL. Well, every fairy story has a complication. Ours had a meddling cousin who came for a surprise visit and then reported back to his aunt and uncle that American decadence had corrupted their son. The little Prince was called home and, knowing that taking me back to Iran meant I'd lose my beautiful head, he left me here.

THERESA. He left you.

(The **PRINCE** *disappears.)*

GIL. Before he could take care of me, they froze his accounts, took his apartment. So…here I am on the street. Just like Manila. Because the only place for *bakla* is no place.

GIL. *(cont.)* But one day, he will come back for me. I held onto the maid outfit for awhile, so he would know it was me, until I realized he would know me without it. He will know.

THERESA. So you trashed it, conveniently disposing of any evidence that your tale is true.

GIL. No. I gave it to a photographer, believe it or not. He wanted to take a picture.

THERESA. If it's true, then get a computer job or something. We'd be in San Francisco in a week.

GIL. As soon as they asked for ID, they'd see my passport and ship me back to the Philippines. Besides, I can't spend my life looking back on two fathers who hate me, two countries who hate me. Here I will get my surgery. And one day, my prince will come.

*(***PERRY** *appears high above the stage where the* **PRINCE** *had been standing.)*

THERESA. But he left you. It's unforgivable.

GIL. I have to believe, though. Otherwise, why put on my pumps everyday? Why beg strangers for change? Why hope at all? If I don't believe in the magic that will make it happen, I might miss my moment.

THERESA. I believe in figuring out where our next meal will come from. There's no time for stories of how the earth came to be or Princes who will never come.

GIL. Or messages delivered in dreams?

THERESA. It's not a message.

*(***PERRY** *disappears.* **THERESA** *stares into Lake Michigan.)*

GIL. A dream can be magic; it's a story you tell yourself. I think you should kiss it.

THERESA. No.

GIL. Kiss the water.

THERESA. If I kiss Lake Michigan, used syringes will bob up and stab me in the mouth.

GIL. You dreamed of water, and something pressing against your lips. There is a whole world beneath those waves and it is calling to you. Touch it, kiss it, and maybe you will hear it more clearly.

*(***THERESA** *gazes into the lake. She leans forward. Nervously, she lowers her head and kisses its surface.)*

(The light ripples a watery kiss…)

(…And fade out except for a shaft of light over **THERESA***'s head. She closes her eyes and breathes deeply.)*

(The sound of wind picking up, blowing into **THERESA***'s face. The sound of waves louder and faster as* **THERESA** *grips the embankment, staring into Lake Michigan's depths. She pants in fear and moans suddenly. Again.)*

(The wind whips violently. The waves crash with thunderous impact. **THERESA***'s throaty moans soar among their sounds in unadulterated ecstasy.)*

End of Scene

Act I: Scene Four

*(***THERESA** *appears midway above the stage, the job application clutched in her fist. At first, only her head is lit, but as she speaks more of her becomes visible.)*

(She is soaking wet.)

THERESA. How did I end up with a life like this? Is that what you've been waiting to hear? Does it keep you awake to know that I am wandering the streets digging through trash? Begging for scraps? Do you wonder how you can lay there, safe between your sheets even though I know that what happens between sheets is dangerous enough to both embrace life and give it away?

He was beautiful. The sun shone in his smile, and his eyes were lights to break fog and guide ships home. He loved me, and that was beautiful. We were beautiful.

Then one morning, I felt nauseous in Chemistry. I took a pregnancy test, and I was. Pregnant. And I don't know if I was wise beyond my years or stupid beyond belief or just fifteen, but I wanted her. I was a well-educated only child. My parents were doctor and nurse from a well-off family back home, and my Lola lived with us in the room next to mine. I could have the baby and go to college, I thought. There would always be someone to care for her, and if he wanted her, too, there were four brothers on his side, two with families of their own. We would make it with our baby of light, ready to burst forth like the sunrise. So I told my parents who the father was, and my mother said:

"You mean that black boy? I don't have a problem with black people. And his family works. It's good, they are working black people. But, Tessie, they own the gas station. In the Philippines, you would not have a baby with that family."

Then came the weeks of silent glances, my mother's whispers to Lola, my father's distant reservation… and before long it was a problem that we weren't sure

about marriage and there wouldn't be money to raise her and did I know how much their adopted friend was loved by his adoptive family? Until finally my father bolted out of his chair at dinner and exploded:

"You refuse to marry. You refuse to give up your baby with a black boy, an American boy. If you want your American baby, then have it. Have your America, but not with us! Give it up, or give us up!"

…

What could I do? She was my family, he was, too. But they were my family first.

When I told him my decision, his eyes clamped shut and re-opened with darkness. There was no longer light there to guide me home. I left him. And it was unforgivable.

That final month of my life, a constant storm churned inside me. The uncontrollable flood of tears convinced me that my baby, who would be taken and given to some other family, would enter the world a shrewd and shrivelled raisin. But when she was born I saw – in that one moment as she was rushed out of the room – that she was beautiful. And then my eyes dried up. My mind shut down. My soul shut the door of this fleshy cage, crossing a barricade of arms over its chest. I embraced the silence of the dead. Everyone – mother, father, *everyone* fled my silence, as it dug its claws into their ears. And empty of her life and burying my own, I rose from my bed. I floated through the hospital in my white paper gown. I stepped into the night and onto the frozen surface of Lake Michigan. I walked away from life a step at a time across the water. Who wants it if it will not allow me that beautiful man, that beautiful girl, that beautiful family to love us all no matter how different or flawed? Or American…

(Lights come up to reveal that it is dawn at The Dippin' Do's. **MARISOL** *has been listening to* **THERESA***'s story.)*

THERESA. *(cont.)* And that is when you found me, Marisol. Sick and shivering, frost stuck to my feet.

(She holds up the application.)

That's how I know what a life like this costs – I've already paid its price. I won't do it again. That is who I am and why I'm here.

But who are you? What are you doing to us? Is it the food? The coffee? Marisol?

MARISOL. I'm not…Nothing. Here. Have a seat. Let me – I'll get you a towel. Have a seat.

THERESA. No. I…I can't. I have to go to the water. I have to go wait by the water.

End of Scene

End of Act I

The Other Act: Scene Two

*(***PERRY** *alone, high above the stage. He is waist-deep in water and has not shaved or cut his hair for a few days.)*

PERRY. I ran to Theresa's hospital room to tell her my parents were suing for custody of the baby who would be our Azure, but she was already gone. I searched for clues. Who was the last one in the room? Was anything left behind? Taken away? But the trail was cold and dead, and so I thought she was.

(The **BOATWOMAN** *appears holding a sturdy pole.)*

BOATWOMAN. How do you know she isn't?

PERRY. Because now I know how her trail became cold and how cold it became. I see her midnight walk on frozen water, bare feet pressing melted prints with slow steps. Footprints that disappeared months later as a spring thaw pulled them apart into a million drops that spread across Lake Michigan. A trail so cold it was eaten by heat, and only remembered again in a shivered surge from big toe to hips, shoulders, head, and memory. The memory of lips.

BOATWOMAN. Then wait for the water to freeze again and for the path to reassemble.

PERRY. The footprints won't reassemble when the path does. And what if my clarity clouds over with the lake? Please – I'll pay anything – just take me across.

BOATWOMAN. A journey over water is a journey between lives, and you're already dangerously close to Death.

PERRY. Close to Death? I'm breathing, moving –

BOATWOMAN. His mark is on you: bleached bone fingers have slashed numbered scars on your soul – some black as bruises, others red like festering wounds – and He has bound them up in cream and sea green bandages.

PERRY. I buried myself in work, when she left. My dad is the Muffler King of Kalamazoo, and I keep his books. First, it was just after school, then I started taking business classes. Before I knew it, I was encouraging my dad to add a tire shop to his gas and tune-ups operation. It was a hit, and the Muffler King dubbed me his Prince of Tires.

BOATWOMAN. And now you think I can help you dig free of the work that has become your grave? Resurrection is not as easy as you think.

PERRY. Resurrection?

BOATWOMAN. There is a boatman who brings souls to Death. Is it that surprising to discover a boatwoman who performs resurrections? You aren't ready to cross; you don't even know what you're asking.

PERRY. If I'm so close to Death, it's because she's so far from me. In Death I became the man she needed. I held onto her daughter. I built the home I couldn't build before. Now I need to fill that home with her. My life…she is waiting for me on the other side. Please.

(The **BOATWOMAN** *considers. She holds out her hand.)*

BOATWOMAN. Step aboard.

End of Scene

Act II: Deception
Scene One

(Afternoon on the waterfront. **HECTOR** *talks to an offstage woman.* **GIL** *absentmindedly shakes the Dippin' Do's cup, paying more attention to the graphic novel in his lap.* **THERESA** *distractedly searches the surface of Lake Michigan as she addresses unseen passersby.)*

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* Hey, girl.

THERESA. Sir.

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* It's beautiful, right?

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

THERESA. Spare some change.

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* That blue on the water, moving in waves like your hair.

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

THERESA. Spare some change.

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* But I'd take the brown of your eyes over that blue any day.

THERESA. Some change, sir.

HECTOR. *(into the audience)* Naw. I ain't no player. I'll be all yours…

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

THERESA. Some change.

HECTOR. Yours…

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

THERESA. Change.

HECTOR. All yours.

(Shake/slide/jingle.)

THERESA. Sir, please, some…

*(***THERESA** *walks to the waterfront, still looking out at the lake.* **HECTOR***'s woman is gone. He joins* **GIL***.)*

(A bearded **MAN** *in a very fine suit and sunglasses appears behind them and observes them silently.)*

HECTOR. Don't read ahead.

GIL. You were distracted.

HECTOR. *(seeing the cup)* What we got?

THERESA. *(not looking away from the water)* Three dollars.

GIL. Bad day.

HECTOR. We could go uptown with that. But not out of town.

GIL. Not west.

HECTOR. On a cross-country bus set for San Francisco where we'll sleep in the sun. Hang in the park. Mess with artistic *chicas* that get creative on the canvas, on the page, between the sheets. Not like this shit hole Chicago.

What the hell we doing by the water? We need an area with heavy foot traffic.

THERESA. I'm staying here.

HECTOR. We gots to make our take, you hear?

THERESA. So go.

HECTOR. We're not bound to her or some shit. We can go wherever we want.

GIL. We can.

(They stare quietly at **THERESA** *for a moment.)*

THERESA. Hector…knowing what…would you have been better off if she had just left you? Your mother.

HECTOR. The hell you talking about?

THERESA. Maybe it's you. The man in my dream is searching for some woman.

HECTOR. Yo, I know which corner to find my moms at.

THERESA. Maybe she's punishing me –

HECTOR. Why would my mom punish you?

THERESA. Not your mom.

HECTOR. Who – ?