

WHIRLIGIG

A full-length drama adapted by
John Newman

from the novel by Paul Fleischman

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BRENT BISHOP, male, 17.

MRS. ZAMORA, female, 40s.

MR. BISHOP, male, 40s.

MRS. BISHOP, female, 40s.

TELEVISION, gender flexible, one or more actors.

HAZ, male, 18.

BRIANNA, female, 17.

MEDIATOR, gender flexible, adult.

MRS. JONES, female, 20s or 30s.

TONY JONES, male, 10.

ANNOUNCER, gender flexible, adult, any age.

CYCLIST, male, 20s or 30s.

CLERK, male, adult.

JENNIFER, female, 15.

GRANDMOTHER, female, at least in her 70s.

EMIL, male, 18.

STUDENT 1, gender flexible, late teens or early 20s.

STUDENT 2, gender flexible, late teens or early 20s.

FLACO'S CHILD, gender flexible, 7.

OLDER FLACO, male, mid 20s.

TAYLOR, gender flexible, 7-10.

JORDAN, gender flexible, 7-10.

CASEY, gender flexible, 7-10.

SANDY, gender flexible, 7-10.

PAINTER, gender flexible, 50s or 60s.

ALEXANDRIA, female, 17.

STEPH, female, 17.

MR. HOWLETT, male, 50s or 60s.

LEA ZAMORA, female, 18. At the discretion of the director, Lea may appear consistently or intermittently throughout the play, observing and reacting to the action, and might manipulate mechanical whirligigs or become part of the human whirligigs until she appears and speaks to Brent at the end of the play.

TRISHA, 19 years old.

OLDER MOTEL MAID, 50s or 60s.

SIGN 1, 2 and 3, written by Mr. Howlett.

YOUNGER FLACO, seen from ages 7 through 27.

CONSTANCIA, seen from ages 17 through 27.

CONSTANCIA'S GRANDFATHER, 60s or 70s.

CONSTANCIA'S GRANDMOTHER, 60s or 70s.

FLACO'S COUSIN, 18.

FIRST MOTHER, 20s.

SECOND MOTHER, 20s.

LITTLE BROTHER, 9.

NOTES ON CASTING

Younger Flaco and Constanca are portrayed in pantomime.

Constancia's Grandfather, Constanca's Grandmother, Flaco's Cousin, First Mother, and Second Mother each speak a single line in Spanish. They may be voiced live by players in the ensemble or their voices could be pre-recorded.

Players in the ensemble play the party guests and may also portray drivers, the street sweeper, the shearwater bird, Little Brother, whirligigs, and the single-line and mime roles.

The play could be single cast with 30 actors (9 male, 9 female, 12 gender flexible) or more with additional players playing single-line roles, mime roles, and ensemble roles. It could be performed with as few as 5 actors (3 male, 2 female) with the following breakdown:

BRENT BISHOP

PLAYER 1 (MALE): Mr. Bishop, Announcer, Clerk, Older Flaco, Taylor, Painter

PLAYER 2 (MALE): Television, Chaz, Mediator, Tony Jones, Cyclist, Emil, Younger Flaco, Jordan, Mr. Howlett, Little Brother

PLAYER 3 (FEMALE): Mrs. Bishop, Brianna, Jennifer, Student 1, Trisha, Flaco's Child, Casey, Alexandria, Signs

PLAYER 4 (FEMALE): Mrs. Zamora, Mrs. Jones, Grandma, Student 2, Constanca, Sandy, Older Motel Maid, Steph

SETTING

The play takes place in Illinois, Washington, California, Florida, and Maine and moves forward and backward in time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The world premiere of this adaptation of *Whirligig* was presented by the Highland High School advanced theatre class with support from the Imagination Celebration at Salt Lake City and the Utah Arts Council as part of the Homestead 21st Century Play Series. It was directed by the playwright and attended by the author and featured the following cast:

- TURQUOISIA BROWN.....Miss Gill, Flaco's Child
- BETTY BURTON.....Baseball Announcer, Jennifer
- SUJEIT CHACON.....Mrs. Zamora, Student 1, Child Three
- AMBER CLOWARD.....Brianna, Clerk, Trisha

JOHN GARRETT.....Cyclist, Mr. Howlett
TAYLOR KIRCH.....Mrs. Bishop, Alexandria
JONNY MACHTIG.....Mr. Bishop, Emil, Child Four
JOHN NEWMAN.....Older Flaco
ROSELINA PALMER.....Grandmother, Painter
ICELA PEREZ.....Tony, Student 2
KATIE ROTH.....Mrs. Jones, Steph
STEWART SINGLETON.....Chaz, Younger Flaco, Child One
STEVEN THOMAS.....Brent Bishop
The second production was produced at Mountain View High School in Orem, Utah. It was directed by Nathan Criman and featured the following cast and crew:

ELIZABETH BINGHAM.....Miss Gill, Older Motel Clerk
MICHELA "TY" CARTER.....Painter
JANAMARIE CARROLL.....Assistant Stage Manager
SAMUEL CHUN.....Tony Jones, Sign, Boy
KEVIN CRIMAN.....Stage Manager, Announcer, Young Man
RANELLE GLINES.....Mrs. Jones, Foreign Student, Sign
CARLY GLOVER.....Brianna, Voice, Whirligig Manipulator
AUSTIN HANSEN.....Chaz, Grandfather, Mr. Howlett
KEN "CHANCE" HOKANSON.....Sound Board
NATHAN HOPOATE.....Television, Flaco
AMBER JESSUP.....Assistant Stage Manager
ALYSSA JEX.....Mother, Steph
TAYLOR KEENE.....Jennifer, Sandy
NICK MAXWELL.....Lighting
BILLY MILLS.....Brent Bishop
ELEANOR MITCHELL.....Mrs. Bishop, Trisha
ASHLEY OWENS.....Mrs. Zamora, Foreign Student
RICHARD PERKINS.....Cyclist, Party Guest, Cousin
JEFFREY RAWLINS.....Party Guest, Clerk
BECCA SMITH.....Party Guest, Casey, Constanca
TRESSA STARRS.....Grandmother, Alexandria
BONNIE STOWELL.....Party Guest, Grandma, Taylor
JOSH TAYLOR.....Assistant Sound Engineer

STEPHEN TULLIS.....Party Guest, Emil
DAVID K. UTRERA.....Mr. Bishop, Flaco's Child
JOHAN WOLFGRAM.....Party Guest, Older Flaco

DEDICATION

For my son James.

(The setting should allow for freedom of movement and quick transformation of characters and environments. The four whirligigs [an angel playing a harp; a mermaid on the spray of a whale; a four-member marching band; and a "master whirligig" with gears and propellers surrounding a young woman's face] may be represented physically by the props or set pieces or could be suggested by actor tableaux or movement.)

SCENE 1: PARTY TIME

(As the play begins, BRENT sits on a stool holding a steering wheel, perhaps above or below an oscillating police light. PLAYERS circle Brent, haunting and taunting him with their chant.)

PLAYERS: Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora. Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora. Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora. Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora.

(The Players freeze, perhaps representing whirligigs. MRS. ZAMORA appears and circles Brent, perhaps referring to the whirligigs or Players in the corners of the playing space.)

MRS. ZAMORA: My only request: create four whirligigs. Set them in the corners of the country: Washington and California, Florida and Maine.

Let her whirligigs give joy, even though she's gone.
Make the smiles she would have made.

(Mrs. Zamora stares directly at Brent.)

How could you have done this to my daughter?

(Mrs. Zamora disappears as we go into Brent's memories.)

(We hear video game music or sound effects, recorded or created by one or more Players, as Brent uses the steering wheel as if it were a game controller.)

BRENT: Can't touch me! No! I'm in control!*

*(*Brent's chant should be spoken in iambic tetrameter: "Can't TOUCH me, NO! I'm IN conTROL!")*

(Players assume the roles of Brent's parents, MR. and MRS. BISHOP. Mr. Bishop stares at an unseen television screen.)

MR. BISHOP: Brent...

BRENT: In a moment...

(Brent continues to play.)

Can't touch me! No! I'm in control!

MRS. BISHOP: Dinner's ready...

(Mrs. Bishop serves Mr. Bishop a dinner plate. She also stares transfixed at the imagined screen.)

BRENT: I'm almost there... Can't touch me! No! I'm in control!

MR. BISHOP: It's getting cold. Your game can wait.

BRENT: All right already!

(Brent ceases playing and video game music ends abruptly. Brent receives a dinner plate from Mrs. Bishop and takes his place next to Mr. Bishop. All three stare ahead at the television. Each of them holds a plate in one hand and eats finger food with the other hand. Each has a universal remote.)

MR. BISHOP: How's the new high school?

BRENT: Better than the last one. Not as good as the one before.

MRS. BISHOP: He needs a more stable environment.

MR. BISHOP: We're staying put this time.

MRS. BISHOP: That's what you said last time.

BRENT: What else is on?

(He clicks his remote. Player[s] act out the various television snippets.)

TELEVISION: It's Friday night, and the Chicago Bulls –

MR. BISHOP: Who cares about the Bulls?

BRENT: Me, if we're staying in Chicago.

MR. BISHOP: We're staying!

MRS. BISHOP: We'd better.

(She clicks her remote.)

TELEVISION: ...a two-car accident on the East-West Tollway –

MR. BISHOP: Slow news day if they're showing that.

(He clicks his remote.)

TELEVISION: A wailing child crawls through the African heat –

MRS. BISHOP: Great spot for our next vacation.

(Mr. Bishop clicks his remote.)

TELEVISION: Nothing gets your clothes so clean –

BRENT: I'm going out tonight.

MRS. BISHOP: I wish I were.

(Mr. Bishop clicks his remote.)

TELEVISION: A storm on the horizon –

(Brent clicks his remote.)

The new Jaguar!

MR. BISHOP: What do you say, Brent? Nice lines!

BRENT: Very nice. Is there a Jaguar in my future?

MR. BISHOP: You're lucky I bought you that Chevy.

(He clicks his remote.)

TELEVISION: Only from Calvin Klein.

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(All three click their remotes. Players[s] portraying television snippets disappears.)

MRS. BISHOP: Where are you going?

BRENT: A party. Chaz's place.

MRS. BISHOP: Have I met Chaz?

BRENT: No, and neither have I.

MR. BISHOP: Life of the party?

BRENT: Center of the crowd.

MRS. BISHOP: Write down where you'll be, and be careful!

BRENT: It's just a party!

(Polka music plays. CHAZ, dressed in black or white and wearing a black or white crown, shows off his dance moves. Players don chess piece hats and become PARTY GUESTS, including BRIANNA.)

CHAZ: Can't touch me! No! I'm in control!

(The others cheer. Chaz approaches Brent, who is making his way into the party apprehensively.)

Hey, it's the new kid! Brent Benson!

BRENT: Bishop. Brent Bishop. What's with the polka music?

CHAZ: If I say it's hip, it's hip!

(Party Guests cheer in agreement. Chaz imitates a snooty teacher.)

You're violating the dress code, Mr. Bishop.

BRENT: I thought this was a party.

CHAZ: Black and white! We're creating a human chessboard!

BRENT: You never told me —

CHAZ: We've been talking about it all week.

BRENT: No one talked to me!

CHAZ: *(In the teacher voice again:)* Really, Mr. Bishop, one month at our school and you're already failing socialization.

BRENT: How could I have known—

CHAZ: Brent the Bishop huh? Let's see if he moves diagonally.

(Party Guests laugh as Chaz moves Brent diagonally to one side. Brent barely contains his agitation and complies.)

Works fine to the left. Let's try to the right.

(Chaz repeats the move in the opposite direction and Party Guests laugh again.)

Seems to be in good working order. You're in.

(All applaud.)

A toast to Brent the Bishop! You drink, don't you?

BRENT: Beer, sometimes. Who doesn't?

(The others laugh scornfully. Chaz hands Brent a shot of hard liquor.)

CHAZ: This has a little more kick to it. You're in the big leagues now. To Brent the Bishop!

PLAYERS: Brent the Bishop!

(All drink, including Brent. Brent nearly chokes and the others laugh as Chaz takes Brent's empty glass and hands him a full one.)

CHAZ: Have another. You'd better sit down. Human chess game in ten minutes!

(Party Guests cheer and talk to Chaz.)

(Brent tries to set aside the second drink when he notices Brianna seated next to him. She wears a queen's tiara, sips her drink, and tries to ignore Brent.)

BRENT: Brianna! Hi!

BRIANNA: Hi.

BRENT: Cheers.

(Brianna lamely clinks her glass against Brent's and looks away.)

BRIANNA: Cheers.

BRENT: So what are you in the chess game?

BRIANNA: Isn't it obvious? You must be a pawn.

BRENT: Not even that. I'm not in black or white.

(To soothe his anxiety, he takes another burning gulp of his drink.)

That history test was deadly.

BRIANNA: Sure was.

BRENT: Hey, if you need any help in math—

BRIANNA: *(Loudly enough for the whole party to hear:)* Stop hanging all over me!

(Party Guests turn and stare at Brent and Brianna. The polka music stops abruptly.)

You're like a leech or something! Can't you take a hint? Go bother someone else! And that goes for school, too!

(Brianna throws her drink in Brent's face and walks away from him. Brent stands. Chaz approaches Brent, grabs his shoulders and tries to force him to sit.)

CHAZ: Bishop to penalty bench: ten minutes for sexual harassment!

(Brent breaks free and slugs Chaz, who falls back into the crowd. Chaz starts to retaliate but holds himself back, deciding to ostracize Brent rather than attack him.)

Go back where you came from, Bishop! You'll never be anything here!

(The Players turn away from Brent.)

Human chessboard! Let the game begin!

(Brent exits, taking the steering wheel as he did in the beginning. The Party Guests taunt Brent as they circle him with chess-like movement. A menacing rhythm may be heard.)

BRENT: No one told me about the stupid clothes!

CHAZ: Pawn makes the first move.

BRENT: I'll never speak to them again!

BRIANNA: Stop hanging all over me!

BRENT: They'll never speak to me.

CHAZ: Bishop moves diagonally.

BRENT: I'm not going back to school!

BRIANNA: Go bother someone else!

BRENT: I'm not going home!

CHAZ: Go back where you came from, Bishop!

BRENT: I have no home.

BRIANNA: You must be a pawn.

BRENT: No life.

CHAZ: You're already failing.

BRENT: No one will hurt me again.

BRIANNA: That test was deadly.

BRENT: I won't be there to hurt.

CHAZ: Can't touch you! No! You're in control!

BRENT: The only way to win is not to play.

CHAZ & BRIANNA: Can't touch you! No! You're in control!

(Brent gradually removes one or both hands from the wheel.)

BRENT: I could be a king if I set...the...wheel...free!

(The oscillating police light may turn on as we hear a screech and a crash. Mr. and Mrs. Bishop take their places at Brent's side and a court-appointed MEDIATOR stands between Brent and Mrs. Zamora. The lights slowly fade up and the police light fades out.)

MRS. ZAMORA: Your car spun into hers. You lived; she died. How could you have done this to my daughter?

BRENT: *(Each of the four should be different:)* I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MEDIATOR: We're meeting today to apologize, to understand, and to atone. We never know all the consequences of our acts. They reach into places we can't see, and into the future where no one can.

MRS. ZAMORA: My husband smashed a wooden chair. He stabbed your letter of apology, and burned it with his cigarette. My children can't stop crying. I'd take my life to be with her, but Lea wouldn't want me to.

BRENT: What can I do to undo what I've done?

MR. BISHOP: Be quiet, son. You may not have to do anything.

BRENT: I want to *do* something!

MEDIATOR: In these agreements, restitution is proposed by the victim's family –

MR. BISHOP: But must be acceptable to both parties.

MEDIATOR: Yes. Apologies to the family, service to a charity of the family's choice, service to the family themselves –

MRS. ZAMORA: Whirligigs.

MR. BISHOP: Excuse me?

MRS. ZAMORA: Whirligigs.

MRS. BISHOP: We're not familiar with that term.

MRS. ZAMORA: My husband, he carves whirligigs: propellers, people, animals, with pivots, rods, and wires...spinning in the breeze...whimsical and almost magical...all who see them smile. Lea loved them.

(Mrs. Zamora hands a photo to Brent or it is relayed to him by the others.)

That's our daughter, Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora, and that's her favorite whirligig.

BRENT: What do you want me to do?

MRS. ZAMORA: I don't believe in retribution like my husband does. Lea had a caring soul, strong and generous. Everyone who saw her smiled...when she played her clarinet, when she volunteered, when she traveled with the band, when she ran her sprints. But now she'll never smile. She'll no longer spread her joy. *(Beat.)* My only request: create four whirligigs of girls who look like Lea. Set them in the corners of the country: Washington and California, Florida and Maine. Let her whirligigs give joy to others, even though she's gone. Make strangers smile, like she would have done.

MRS. BISHOP: You can't be serious.

MEDIATOR: It's a fair request, according to the guidelines.

MR. BISHOP: How would he travel? On his private jet?

(Mrs. Zamora pulls out a bus pass, which is relayed to Brent.)

MRS. ZAMORA: A Greyhound bus pass, forty days, unlimited.

MRS. BISHOP: Busses? They're not clean, or safe!

MR. BISHOP: He's never traveled anywhere alone!

MRS. BISHOP: And the terms of his probation –

MEDIATOR: It would be exceptional, but if requested by the victim's family –

BRENT: I'll do it.

MR. & MRS. BISHOP: What?!

BRENT: I'll build the whirligigs.

(We hear a sad classical melody on a violin – think Sarah Chang – as Mrs. Zamora hands Brent a book on whirligig construction. Mediator escorts Mr. and Mrs. Bishop away.)

SCENE 2: WASHINGTON

(Players assume the roles of TONY JONES, a young boy playing a violin, and MRS. JONES, who sets up camp. Player[s] may manipulate or become the whirligig angel. The angel plays a harp, and as it moves briefly in the wind, harp music plays. It goes still. Tony plays and stops.)

MRS. JONES: Keep practicing, Tony.

TONY: I can't believe you made me bring my violin on a campout!

(Tony resumes playing the violin and stops a second time as the harp music and whirligig resume briefly and stop.)

MRS. JONES: You have to practice every day, no exceptions. Remember Sarah Chang?

TONY: How could I forget?

MRS. JONES: Look at the whirligig angel. See how she practices all the time? That's how she'll get into Honors Orchestra, and then the Seattle Symphony...

(Mrs. Jones disappears.)

TONY: As if she's a real person.

(Tony plays and stops a third time as the harp music and whirligig resume again. Tony sets the violin aside, picks up a rock, and begins a pitching windup.)

Here's the windup, and the pitch...

(Tony throws the rock and hits the whirligig. The harp music stops abruptly and the angel figure reels.)

She's out! The crowd goes wild!

MRS. JONES: You threw a rock at the angel?! What did she ever do to you?

TONY: She made me look bad.

MRS. JONES: Put away your violin.

(Tony complies. Mrs. Jones produces a notebook and pencil.)

If you're not going to practice, you can write your summer essay.

TONY: Mom! This is my last week before fifth grade! Can't I just enjoy myself for once?!

MRS. JONES: Tony, you're gifted.

TONY: I'm Korean! It's not the same thing!

MRS. JONES: *(Thrusts the notebook into Tony's hands:)* Five hundred words on what you did this summer!

TONY: The truth?

MRS. JONES: Yes!

TONY: All right. You asked for it!

(Mrs. Jones exits. Tony writes.)

What I did this summer...the untold story.

(Tony looks at his watch, checks to make sure his mother is really gone, and pulls a radio out of his shirt pocket. He sneaks the earphone into his ear. He listens to the game leaning over his notebook, but not writing. The radio ANNOUNCER for the Seattle Mariners is heard from onstage or offstage, perhaps speaking into a small megaphone as if it were a microphone. If offstage, you may ignore stage directions that indicate he reappears.)

ANNOUNCER: ...top of the seventh and the Seattle Mariners are down by one. Two runners on base, first and third, two outs, full count –

MRS. JONES: *(Returns and notices Tony's hidden earphone:)* Tony!

TONY: Come on, Mom! The game is on and it's close!

(Mrs. Jones takes Tony's earphone or radio.)

MRS. JONES: The game is off. Case closed.

(Tony slumps over his notebook. The Announcer reappears, perhaps using the megaphone like a microphone at first.)

ANNOUNCER: And now, during the seventh-inning stretch, let's talk with Tony Jones, our Mariners super-fan of the game. I'm sure your proud parents are out there listening.

TONY: Nah, Dad thinks sports fans are time-wasters, and Mom says your voice gives her migraines.

ANNOUNCER: *(Without reacting to what Tony said:)* Thanks for sharing, Tony. I understand you recently celebrated your tenth birthday.

TONY: Yep. I asked for a baseball mitt, a new radio, and a gift certificate to Sam's Sports Cards. I got a microscope, a music stand, and a Sarah Chang CD.

ANNOUNCER: Sarah Chang, the violin phenomenon of Korean descent?

TONY: That's right.

ANNOUNCER: Do you play the violin too?

TONY: Do I ever! Suzuki lessons since I was four, right after I was adopted from that Korean orphanage. I practice an hour before school, and two hours after while my friends are playing baseball!

ANNOUNCER: That's one tough training schedule. What about the leisure side?

TONY: Well, we took a family camping trip.

ANNOUNCER: Did you enjoy yourself?

TONY: Buying the stuff at REI was fun.

ANNOUNCER: I understand you had a run-in with a whirligig angel.

TONY: Yep. Hit her with a beanball, right in the harp. Talk about breaking the pledge!

ANNOUNCER: For our listeners at home, what is this "pledge" you speak of?

TONY: It's like the Pledge of Allegiance, but it's only for Americans from Asia.

ANNOUNCER: Could you give us a taste of it?

TONY: "I pledge allegiance to Sarah Chang and all other Asian Americans, to always be quiet and diligent: one outstanding individual without liberty, working hardest of all."

ANNOUNCER: That's some pledge. And you never broke it until today?

(Tony re-enacts the "crash and burn" at the recital, either in pantomime or taking the violin from the case and playing it. Alternately, a recording of the sound of the failing recital piece could be used.)

TONY: Well, there was the recital last month. I was playing Mozart, at least I was trying to. First I forgot the repeat, then I forgot the bowing, then I forgot the notes...

ANNOUNCER: Wow! A new league record for errors committed in a single composition! Must have been tough facing the fans after that.

(Tony stops playing.)

TONY: Let's just say we didn't stay for refreshments.

ANNOUNCER: It's tough to choke after all that practice...

(Mrs. Jones appears, unseen by Tony.)

TONY: To tell the truth, I got what I deserved. I snuck away from practicing when my mom was gone and went to the movies with my friends. You know how many films you can see with a single multiplex ticket?

ANNOUNCER: Guess you just have to put the recital behind you and practice twice as hard to get your skills up to major league standards.

TONY: Actually, I'm thinking of retiring...

(Tony sees Mrs. Jones and Announcer disappears. Tony hastily takes up the violin.)

...or practicing twice as hard to get my skills up to major league standards.

(Tony resumes his scale exercises. Mrs. Jones grabs his bow and stops Tony.)

MRS. JONES: Don't you like playing the violin?

TONY: I did, when I wasn't practicing so much.

MRS. JONES: Don't you want to get better?

TONY: Better than who?

MRS. JONES: I guess I assumed...

TONY: Mom, I don't want to give it up forever. Just for a little while. Look at the angel. She's not playing now. If she practiced all the time, her arms would fall off. She plays her harp, then she rests, then she plays again.

MRS. JONES: (*Nods, considering:*) So you need a rest... How long?

TONY: Five years.

(Mrs. Jones gives him a look.)

Two?

(Mrs. Jones sighs.)

Months? Until after the World Series?

MRS. JONES: How about until after fall baseball league?

TONY: You mean it?

MRS. JONES: Will you do adjudication in January?

TONY: I'll practice as hard as a whirligig angel!

(Mrs. Jones smiles, gives Tony back the radio, and exits. Announcer reappears.)

ANNOUNCER: Pretty amazing, Tony. You broke your pledge.

TONY: Yeah, and my mom broke hers.

ANNOUNCER: How do you feel now?

TONY: Like I've just thrown up. You know what I mean? It's yucky, but it feels better when you get it over with.

ANNOUNCER: That's the end of the seventh-inning stretch. Now back to our game.

(Tony shoulders the violin bow like a baseball bat.)

TONY: Tony Jones at the plate. It's low and outside, swing...

(Tony swings.)

It connects and it's over the fence! Eat your heart out, Sarah Chang! *(Beat.)* And whoever put the angel here...

(Tony mouths "thank you" and gives a "thumbs-up." Tony exits with violin.)

SCENE 3: THE AFTERLIFE

(Harmonica music is heard as CYCLIST enters, perhaps on a bicycle, lays out a sleeping bag, sits or lies on it, and starts playing the tune Americans know as "My Country Tis of Thee" on his harmonica. Brent enters tentatively, carrying a heavy backpack. [Note that Scene 3 is set prior to Scene 2.]

BRENT: Excuse me...

(Cyclist continues to play.)

Sorry to bother you...

(Brent stands in front of Cyclist and gets his attention.)

Hi! Would you mind if I shared your campsite tonight? *(Beat.)* The place is full, but I walked three miles.

(Cyclist stops playing. Crickets may be heard in the background.)

I'll go somewhere else.

CYCLIST: Be my guest. Pick out a corner for yourself.

BRENT: I'll pay you half the fee for the campsite.

CYCLIST: No need. Glad to have the company.

BRENT: Thanks. I hate asking favors.

CYCLIST: Most people do.

(Cyclist resumes playing as Brent removes his sleeping bag from his pack.)

BRENT: "My Country Tis of Thee"?

(Cyclist stops playing.)

CYCLIST: "God Save the Queen." I play it with a Canadian accent.

(Brent unrolls his sleeping bag in the open air.)

BRENT: Nice view of Puget Sound.

CYCLIST: What brings you here?

BRENT: Just...seeing the country. What about you?

CYCLIST: Biking south from Canada. Heading down the coast to San Francisco. Seeing the country. Studying the strange customs of the natives. No offense.

BRENT: Where are you from?

CYCLIST: Prince George, British Columbia, halfway to the Yukon.

BRENT: I've never talked to a Canadian before.

CYCLIST: At least you've heard of Canada. That puts you ahead of most of your countrymen.

(Fireworks are heard in the background as lights flash on stage.)

Ah, yes. Noisemaking devices to dispel evil spirits on your Independence Day.

BRENT: I didn't realize the campground would be so full. I forgot it was the Fourth of July.

CYCLIST: So did I.

BRENT: Do you have the Fourth of July in Canada?

CYCLIST: No, we just skip from the third to the fifth.

BRENT: I mean, do you have an Independence Day? Did you have a revolution?

CYCLIST: We got our independence differently—more patience, less fighting—but eventually we all strike out on our own.

BRENT: Thanks for...sharing.

CYCLIST: It's your country, eh? Did you hike all the way here?

BRENT: I've been traveling by bus...never been out on my own before.

CYCLIST: You meet a lot of interesting people on busses, eh?

BRENT: I never talked to anyone on the bus. You're the first person I've talked to since I left Chicago, or even since...

(He opens his backpack.)

I listened. For hours. People can be interesting.

CYCLIST: Quite an unusual load.

BRENT: Yeah, varnish, drills, and blades... If I were flying, they'd think I was a terrorist.

(Cyclist does not respond.)

I'm not... They're tools of my trade... I'm a...traveling whirligig-maker.

CYCLIST: That's unusual.

BRENT: Actually, I'm just starting out. Just...something I... wanted to do, because...I needed to do something.

CYCLIST: Best reason to do anything, eh?

(Brent shows Cyclist the image in his book of his first project.)

BRENT: That's the one I'm going to build first. An angel playing a harp.

CYCLIST: Looks pretty complicated.

BRENT: You think so?

(Cyclist shrugs.)

Maybe. I'll manage.

CYCLIST: Where are you going to mount it?

BRENT: I hadn't thought of that. I should have brought some poles.

CYCLIST: How about hanging it in that tree?

BRENT: Could I do that?

CYCLIST: It's your country.

(They lie back and look up at the sky.)

Plenty of stars.

BRENT: A lot more than you can see in a city.

CYCLIST: Do you know the stars?

BRENT: Just the Big Dipper.

CYCLIST: That bright one's Deneb, in the tail of the swan. Deneb gets you to Vega and over to Altair. The summer triangle.

BRENT: I didn't know the stars had names.

CYCLIST: They used to lead sailors. Must be satisfying.

BRENT: What do you mean?

CYCLIST: To leave something for someone else to find, like a star to show the way.

BRENT: I just hope it makes somebody smile.

SCENE 4: CALIFORNIA

(Brent and Cyclist disappear from one area of the stage as JENNIFER enters from another. She approaches the mermaid whirligig, which might be manipulated or represented by Player[s]. Jennifer stares and smiles at the whirligig. CLERK approaches her, unnoticed.)

CLERK: *(With a thick British accent:)* May I help you, Miss?

JENNIFER: No, I'm...just visiting.

CLERK: Are you seeking a room at our international youth hostel?

JENNIFER: That's what this house is now?

CLERK: From what country do you hail?

JENNIFER: Poland, at least my grandmother does—I'm American, and Jewish...but I'm not traveling.

CLERK: Last week, you seemed to be taking someone on a journey.

JENNIFER: You remember me? And the lady who was with me?

CLERK: I have an uncanny memory for faces.

JENNIFER: My grandmother—I just came from her funeral.

CLERK: She seemed to be a remarkable woman.

JENNIFER: An amazingly positive person, for someone who'd been in Auschwitz.

CLERK: Not as a visitor, I presume?

(Jennifer shakes her head.)

JENNIFER: She talked about the concentration camp when she brought me here. She'd refused to tell me about it for years. Last week, she called to me from her bedroom while my parents were out.

(GRANDMA enters. She wears an old-fashioned, ill-fitting dress and walks with a cane. Jennifer steps into the scene while Clerk remains listening from the perimeter of the scene.)

GRANDMA: Rachel?

JENNIFER: Grandma, Rachel is your sister. She died ten years ago. It's me. Jennifer. Your granddaughter.

GRANDMA: Jennifer! So grown-up you are, Jenny, dear. So tall. Such beautiful hair.

JENNIFER: Grandma, why are you out of bed, and dressed?!

GRANDMA: I'm ready now.

JENNIFER: Ready for what? Are you feeling all right?

GRANDMA: I feel weak. No strength.

JENNIFER: You usually say, "like Jesse Owens," or "like Joe DiMaggio."

GRANDMA: Not today. Today, I feel like me. Let's go.

JENNIFER: Go? Go where?!

GRANDMA: Do you drive, Kindelah?

JENNIFER: Yes, but I don't have a real license yet. Where do you need to go?

GRANDMA: Someplace. Several places.

JENNIFER: Grandma, I can call my father. He'll get you what you need on the way home.

GRANDMA: This no one can bring me, Kindelah. I need to go to it.

JENNIFER: But I only have my learner's permit! An adult has to be with me when I drive.

GRANDMA: I'm not an adult? I'm not old enough?

(She laughs and her laugh turns into a coughing spell.)

JENNIFER: But Grandma, my mother can take you, if you just wait...

GRANDMA: No more waiting. Waiting is dangerous at my age.

(Jennifer gives in and helps Grandma into a car, perhaps represented by a couple of chairs or blocks.)

JENNIFER: Grandma, you're all dressed up. Where are we going? Somewhere fancy?

GRANDMA: I'll show you.

JENNIFER: All we have is the Toyota. I'm not good with a stick shift.

(She looks down at the gearshift handle.)

The diagram is worn off. Grandma, which way is reverse?

GRANDMA: I never learned to drive. You will find it yourself.

(Jennifer puts the car into fourth gear. She releases the clutch and the force pushes Jennifer and Grandma back in their seats. The car dies.)

I believe that is not reverse.

JENNIFER: That must be fourth. It's good it died. Otherwise we'd have gone through the back of the garage. So maybe it's over here...

GRANDMA: On second thought, maybe it is better that I wait...

JENNIFER: Grandma, I can drive!

(Jennifer puts it into reverse and the car thrusts backward, propelling Jennifer and Grandma forward in their seats.)

I found reverse.

GRANDMA: It is good you did not find airbags.

JENNIFER: Just tell me where you need to go.

GRANDMA: To your left. I'll tell you when we get there.

(Players may assume the roles of drivers behind Jennifer's car.)

JENNIFER: How can I get you where you want to go if you won't tell me –

GRANDMA: Stop.

(Jennifer slams on the brakes, as do the other drivers around her. Players react and gesture, but they are silent, as they are outside the windows of Jennifer's car and can be seen but not heard.)

JENNIFER: *(Shouting through the glass of her side window:)* I'm sorry! My grandmother told me to stop!

(Grandma stares out her window.)

What's so important that we had to stop here?

GRANDMA: It is a birch tree.

JENNIFER: *(Beat.)* A birch tree?!

GRANDMA: There were very many birches in Poland. The white bark. So beautiful... *(Beat.)* Alright, Jenny, dear. Let's go.

(Jennifer stares at Grandma, astonished and frustrated but unable to yell at the old woman. The other drivers disappear.)

JENNIFER: Grandma, next time you want to stop, give me a little warning, okay?

GRANDMA: What?

JENNIFER: (*Louder:*) I said, "Next time you want me to stop..."

GRANDMA: Stop.

JENNIFER: Here?

GRANDMA: Yes.

JENNIFER: I will, as soon as I'm clear.

(She stops, without upsetting drivers this time.)

GRANDMA: No, no, back a little ways...

JENNIFER: At least I know where reverse is now...

(The car pushes them forward, but not nearly as much this time.)

GRANDMA: You are learning, Kindelah. From here we walk.

(Jennifer and Grandma get out of the car.)

JENNIFER: Grandma, are we lost? This is a Chinese restaurant. I can find you a Kosher deli...

GRANDMA: This was our stationary store for twenty-six years. So many good times I had in this place. (*Beat.*) We go now.

JENNIFER: Where?

GRANDMA: This time I lead.

JENNIFER: Why are we going to that old house?

GRANDMA: Rachel lived there. Rachel, my sister...

JENNIFER: My middle name is Rachel. Why did Jewish parents give their daughter a first name like Jennifer?

GRANDMA: Your parents are trying to forget!

JENNIFER: But we need to remember! They never go to synagogue and they don't light the menorah. Last year, they even put up a Christmas tree!

GRANDMA: But you, Kindelah, enrolled yourself in Hebrew School and chanted the Torah at your Bat Mitzvah. I was so proud of you...

JENNIFER: Why don't my parents...

GRANDMA: They try to blend in. They try to forget. There is some wisdom in that. Back home now.

JENNIFER: But Grandma, we never –

GRANDMA: Thank you, Kindelah, very much.

JENNIFER: But we never got what you wanted. Where did you want to go?

GRANDMA: To see a birch tree, like the ones where I grew up. To see the store I ran with your grandfather, after the war. And to see Rachel's house. All these I wanted to see. One last time.

JENNIFER: You're getting better, Grandma! You've got lots of life left!

GRANDMA: *(She shakes her head.)* Some things, Kindelah, you know inside. You were the driver, but you did not understand the journey. Before we go, we must walk to the porch.

JENNIFER: We can't just walk into someone else's yard –

GRANDMA: At my age, I do as I please.

(Jennifer helps Grandma up to the porch. Clerk walks past them.)

JENNIFER: I'm sorry. My grandmother has a mind of her own.

CLERK: So does mine. Make yourself at home.

(Clerk leaves the scene.)

GRANDMA: I want you to see something.

JENNIFER: What? The wind-thing?

GRANDMA: Look at it.

JENNIFER: It's just a toy. It's a silly, ridiculous...

(Jennifer begins to laugh and Grandma laughs with her.)

GRANDMA: Somebody said there shouldn't be laughing after Auschwitz. That nobody should ever want to laugh again after the things that happened there. But I was there, Kindelah. Yes, very terrible. What I saw you should never dream. But all those who died want that we should have a life with laughing. Not sad all the time, not always reading about men who like killing. They'd want us to laugh all the laughs that were taken from them. People are not all Hitler, Kindelah, not even then, not even there. People are also good, like the one who made this wind toy to give happiness to all who pass. This, not the other, I want to remember. This I tell you, for you have the permit for learning. I have the permit for teaching.

(Grandma and Jennifer embrace. They dis-embrace and look at the whirligig. Grandma exits gracefully. Jennifer turns and Grandma is gone and the Clerk is beside her, looking at the whirligig.)

CLERK: Your grandmother was a wonderful person, and so is the young Canadian who made the whirligig.

SCENE 5: TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR

(Jennifer exits. We may hear "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," perhaps played on a harmonica. Clerk stands behind the counter as Brent enters, wearing his backpack.)

BRENT: Excuse me, is this the San Diego International Youth Hostel?

CLERK: Yes indeed, although it looks suspiciously like an ordinary American residence. Passport or visa, please.

BRENT: Passport?

CLERK: By policy, I may only accept foreign travelers, the theory being that since this is your own country, you already have a place to stay.

BRENT: Not in my case...

(He sighs deeply and prepares to go. He turns.)

Could you tell me how to get to—

CLERK: Of course, as it is unlikely that anyone else will show up this morning, and we being unusually empty, you might just convince me that you're...Canadian?

(Clerk smiles. Brent catches on.)

What Canadian city are you from?

BRENT: *(After a moment, with confidence:)* Prince George! British Columbia, halfway to the Yukon.

CLERK: Excellent. And what's Canada's capital?

BRENT: Um, Montreal?

CLERK: Right you are! It's Ottawa! And what year did my native England wrest control of your fair country from France?

(Brent shrugs.)

1763! Correct again! Welcome and sign our register.

(Brent sighs, relieved. EMIL enters.)

Emil, would you show this young man to his room?

(Emil leads Brent to a cot in another area of the stage. Brent sets down his pack and may leave it packed or may unroll his sleeping bag on top of the cot.)

EMIL: Where are you from?

BRENT: *(Apprehensively:)* You're not from Canada, are you?

EMIL: Germany. Do you speak any German?

BRENT: I've taken French...

EMIL: Alors, nous parlons en français, d'accord? (Then we'll speak in French, all right?)

BRENT: Oh, not enough to understand it.

EMIL: Oh. I am starting university this fall. This morning, I am visiting the San Diego Zoo. Do you want to come?

BRENT: No, I have to start on... Sure...I'll go with you. Thank you.

(Brent and Emil step into another area of the stage. The lights change abruptly and we hear sea lions, either recorded sounds or sounds made by Players.)

EMIL: California Sea Lions. Listen to their songs. They're communicating.

BRENT: Do you play a musical instrument?

EMIL: Just clarinet and oboe, and, of course, English horn.

BRENT: Even the sea lions can make music.

EMIL: You cannot?

BRENT: I'm thinking of learning the harmonica.

EMIL: Richard Dana mentions them.

BRENT: Harmonicas?

EMIL: No, sea lions. In *Two Years Before the Mast*.

BRENT: Oh. Is that a foreign film?

EMIL: It's a nineteenth century journal of American sailor. A classic. I've been reading it this month.

BRENT: I've never heard of it.

EMIL: The first great book about the sea. It inspired Herman Melville, and Joseph Conrad and...

(Brent gives Emil a blank stare.)

You have never heard of them either, have you?

BRENT: They weren't on my required reading list.

EMIL: Not mine either. I was curious. Dana Point is named for the author.

BRENT: Dana Point! Our bus stopped there for lunch!

EMIL: Dana was an educated man from Harvard. He traveled to California as a common sailor in 1834.

BRENT: Did he get kicked out of college?

EMIL: His vision was poor. He needed to rest his eyes, but his journey was anything but restful.

BRENT: Did he come here to San Diego?

EMIL: What there was of it. There was just a mission and a trading post.

BRENT: You know more about American history than I do.

EMIL: I'm sorry if I am talking too much. Both of my parents are teachers. They would like me to become one as well.

BRENT: There's not much money in it.

EMIL: It's the most valuable thing one can do with a life. My father says a teacher lives forever through his students. He never knows how far his influence reaches.

(Brent moves back to an area of the stage representing the porch of the hostel, where he puts the finishing touches on the whirligig of a mermaid on a whale's spray. Two foreign STUDENTS debate among themselves as Brent works.)

STUDENT 1: Not a bad likeness of an orca whale.

BRENT: It took me three days to get it right.

STUDENT 2: Just like Jonah.

STUDENT 1: I saw an orca in Alaska last summer, not ten meters from our small boat.

STUDENT 2: I saw one at Sea World yesterday. They call her "Shamu."

STUDENT 1: Whales don't last more than a few years in those theme parks.

STUDENT 2: That one has been there for at least twenty.

STUDENT 1: They keep the name and throw away the whale.

STUDENT 2: Well, your country is one of the few that still permits commercial whaling.

STUDENT 1: Yes, and I protest against it, but you are supporting exploitation by going to such a park.

STUDENT 2: Theme parks raise public awareness of environmental issues and help preserve species.

STUDENT 1: Brent, what is Canada's position on orca whales?

BRENT: Oh, I don't really keep up with the news...

STUDENT 2: Then what are your opinions?

BRENT: They're...black and white.

STUDENT 2: Your opinions?

BRENT: No, the whales.

STUDENT 2: Oh yes, he is an artist! He does not need political opinions.

STUDENT 1: The most important artists are always political. What is the meaning of the mermaid on the spray of the whale?

BRENT: She's just...a mermaid.

STUDENT 2: Sometimes, Mr. Freud, a mermaid is just a mermaid.

(Student 1 and Student 2 exit as Clerk enters. Brent puts the wood pieces back in his backpack and moves to the mermaid whirligig as if he is mounting it for the first time.)

CLERK: Emil checked out while you were gone.

BRENT: He did?! I didn't get a chance to say goodbye.

CLERK: He left you this.

(He hands Brent the book.)

BRENT: *Two Years Before the Mast.* Thanks.

CLERK: He left his address on the back cover.

BRENT: I'll read it tomorrow on the bus.

CLERK: Leaving so soon?

BRENT: I've done what I came here to do.

CLERK: *(Reads the name on the mermaid:)* "Lea Rosalia Santos Zamora." Who is she?

BRENT: A mermaid. A person. *(Beat.)* Someone the world should remember.

CLERK: A remarkable piece of folk art.

BRENT: Do you mind if I mount it here on the porch?

CLERK: It would bring a bit of life to the place. But there is no need to be offering gifts.

BRENT: I'd just have to mail it back to Prince George, by way of Ottawa.

CLERK: *(Smiling:)* Then we accept it as a token of friendship from our Canadian traveler.

BRENT: Your kindness was more than I deserved.

CLERK: Just help someone else to find his way.

(Clerk exits. We hear "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" as Brent stares at the whirligig mermaid, perhaps formed or manipulated by Player[s].)

SCENE 6: FLORIDA

(Brent exits as the music shifts to the sounds of a street sweeper, either recorded or created live by the Players. OLDER FLACO and FLACO'S CHILD take their places in the cab of a street sweeping vehicle, which may be represented by Players.)

FLACO'S CHILD: Still dark outside, Papa.

OLDER FLACO: No traffic. Just you and me. Muy tranquilo. (Very peaceful.)

FLACO'S CHILD: You must get lonely in this street sweeper machine.

OLDER FLACO: Lonely can be good sometimes. I never saw a street sweeper until I came here from Puerto Rico. I was younger than you are now. I thought it was a monster. Now I know it is peaceful, like a shearwater bird, or a whirligig...

FLACO'S CHILD: Peaceful? But it's so loud.

OLDER FLACO: Peace is very hard to find. The Pope is always asking for peace. He tells the countries to stop their wars. Every year he tells them, but more wars always come. That is why we moved from San Juan.

FLACO'S CHILD: Because of fighting?

(We hear a loud explosion and perhaps see a flash of light. YOUNGER FLACO runs in to investigate.)

OLDER FLACO: One day a bomb went off near our house. I ran to see.

(Younger Flaco sees a maimed victim of the bomb [unseen] and backs away.)

Then I wished I hadn't. One month later, we moved here to Miami.

FLACO'S CHILD: Did you speak English?

OLDER FLACO: No one in my family did.

(We may hear the sound of power tools in a woodshop. Younger Flaco pantomimes cutting a piece of wood in a way that would endanger his fingers.)

When I was in wood working class, in junior high school, my teacher got mad because I didn't understand him. One day he asked me a question.

(Younger Flaco reacts to an unseen shop teacher.)

I didn't understand his English so I didn't say anything back. His face got red. He grabbed my hair and lifted me up and yelled some words right in my face. When he let me go, I swore at him in Spanish. Then I ran out of the room and went home. I never went back.

(We may hear alternating short snippets of Jamaican reggae and Willie Colón as Younger Flaco, in pantomime, operates the dishwashing machine in a dancing manner.)

I was only fourteen when I got a job in a restaurant, while I was supposed to be in school. Everyone in the kitchen spoke Spanish. My father told me I needed an education, but when I gave him my first paycheck, he didn't argue. I worked there until boys my age had graduated. I loaded and unloaded the dishwashing machine. They called me "Flaco" because I was so skinny. There were two cooks: one from Puerto Rico, who played Willie Colón. The other was from Jamaica and played reggae. They used to fight over the music player. Not even the Pope could stop that war.

(CONSTANCIA, a young woman a little older than Younger Flaco, flirts with him.)

FLACO'S CHILD: So how did you ever learn English?

OLDER FLACO: I went to night classes, and one of the waitresses helped me with my English, one phrase at a time. Her name was Constancia.

FLACO'S CHILD: Mama?

OLDER FLACO: Si. She was so kind and beautiful. Everyone gave her generous tips.

(Constancia lifts her serving towel to reveal a dollar bill folded into a ring.)

She'd share some with the busboys, but she always gave more to me.

(Younger Flaco kneels and puts the ring on Constancia's finger.)

We became engaged...

(Constancia places the serving towel on her head like a veil and kneels beside Younger Flaco. We may hear a church bell.)

Then we got married.

(They turn toward the unseen priest. Younger Flaco and Constancia vow and kiss.)

Every day, I told myself that I was lucky.

(Younger Flaco stands with delight, turning and moving a step or two away. When he turns back, Constancia has risen and the veil has become a small baby bundle.)

One year later, Constancia gave birth to a beautiful baby.

FLACO'S CHILD: Me?

OLDER FLACO: No, your sister.

FLACO'S CHILD: My sister?!

(Older Flaco crosses himself. Flaco's Child does likewise. We see Constancia cradling the towel like a baby blanket, unfolding it, and laying it out as she kneels on the ground.)

OLDER FLACO: Your mama was a very good mother. But when your sister was just one year old, she got a cold. Then it got worse. And the baby died.

FLACO'S CHILD: You never told me that before.

OLDER FLACO: Your mother is still too sad to speak of it.

(We see Constancia grieving for her dead child at the grave. Younger Flaco tries to comfort her without effect. She rises and sits, staring straight ahead.)

FLACO'S CHILD: Did she go back to the restaurant?

(Older Flaco shakes his head.)

OLDER FLACO: She turned on the TV and let it talk all day long. When she watched, her eyes didn't move.

(Younger Flaco places a white shawl over Constancia's unresponsive shoulders.)

Finally, she had another baby.

(Constancia cradles the shawl as a baby blanket.)

FLACO'S CHILD: Yo?

OLDER FLACO: Si.

(Older Flaco smiles at his Child, who smiles back. In the background, Constancia cradles her infant protectively in one arm while enacting some of the described actions with the other. She keeps Younger Flaco at a distance, refusing to let him take the child from her.)

OLDER FLACO: Instead of laughing and smiling at you, she worried all the time. She mopped the floor and vacuumed every day. She sprayed the TV, the furniture, and all your

toys. She surrounded your crib with special candles and statues of saints and safety charms.

FLACO'S CHILD: I remember.

(Constancia exits. Older Flaco is alone onstage. He is harassed by the increasingly loud and insistent voices of CONSTANCIA'S GRANDFATHER, CONSTANCIA'S GRANDMOTHER, FLACO'S COUSIN, FIRST MOTHER, and SECOND MOTHER, either recorded or voiced by Player[s].)

OLDER FLACO: When you were four, your mother's grandparents came from Puerto Rico to live with us. Her grandfather played dominoes with the man next door and argued about politics.

CONSTANCIA'S GRANDFATHER: ¡No sabes jugar dominoes y no entiendos la politica! (You don't know how to play dominos and don't understand politics!)

OLDER FLACO: Her grandmother lectured your mama how to raise you.

CONSTANCIA'S GRANDMOTHER: ¡Dale platano, como en Puerto Rico! (Feed him plantain, like in Puerto Rico!)

OLDER FLACO: Then my teenage cousin from New Jersey moved in.

FLACO'S COUSIN: ¡Todo lo que quiero hacer es cantar rock and roll! (All I want to do is sing rock and roll!)

OLDER FLACO: He played loud rock music and stayed out late. The first time he borrowed my car, he wrecked it. Then I lost my job because I couldn't get to work. All day I was home with you, with all the noise, but Mama wouldn't let me play with you. Constancia started taking care of babies.

(We hear a baby crying, either recorded or voiced by a Player.)

First it was two...

FIRST MOTHER: ¡Mi hijo necesita ser disciplinado! (My child needs to be disciplined!)

OLDER FLACO: Then three...

SECOND MOTHER: ¡No le puedo pagar esta semana, perdi mi trabajo! (I won't be able to pay you this week. I lost my job!)

OLDER FLACO: There was always a baby crying, and the grandparents yelling, and the TV loud, and the rock and roll.

(We hear multiple voices from the previous dialogue overlapping and then there is sudden silence, with the Players frozen. Younger Flaco stares at the image. We may hear a classical guitar strum. A Player may dance as a shearwater bird or Player[s] might manipulate a puppet.)

One morning on TV, I saw a picture of a shearwater bird. The announcer said this bird lives almost all of its life on the ocean. I wished I could be that bird: alone, far from land, no one else around, muy tranquilo.

(Player[s] and/or recording resumes the previous noise and chaos. Younger Flaco covers his ears, gets into a car, and drives away. The voices and sounds slowly fade as Younger Flaco escapes.)

I borrowed a car from our neighbors and drove. Not driving to look for a job, just driving, never wanting to go home again. I drove across the Everglades and stopped at the first beach town. I asked the captain of a fishing boat if he'd ever seen a shearwater bird. He said all the time. He let me on his boat for half-price. I looked back. I couldn't see land. That felt good. I felt like a shearwater.

(Younger Flaco stares as the sound of squabbling shearwater birds builds, either recorded or made by Player[s].)

The captain pointed at a flock of birds, diving into the water, fighting over fish, stealing fish from one another...very noisy! He said they were shearwaters. I couldn't believe those were the birds I'd been dreaming of. I felt sad all the way back to land.

(Younger Flaco is alone as he spies and examines the marching band whirligig. We hear a jazzy recording of "When the Saints Go Marching In." The whirligig moves, either manipulated or represented by Player[s].)

I got off the boat and walked down the pier. I saw a whirligig of a wooden marching band: clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and drum. Birds don't live alone, I thought. They live in flocks, like people, like the marching band. And whenever there's a group, there's usually fighting, but sometimes people make music and dance together like the whirligig.

(Younger Flaco dances offstage, perhaps following the Player[s] enacting or activating the marching band whirligig. The soundtrack morphs into the sounds of Willie Colón's band.)

Soon the sun will come up and the traffic will start, and we'll head to back to our noisy home. I'll be ready for it. Turn on the tape player.

FLACO'S CHILD: Willie Colón!

(Players may come together to create the marching band whirligig with a clarinet player, trumpet player, trombone player, and a drummer.)

SCENE 7: APPRENTICES

(In another area of the stage, Brent enters his room at a cheap motel. He sets down his pack and discovers a note set out for him to find. TRISHA, a young motel maid, speaks the words she left on the card from another part of the stage.)

TRISHA: Welcome to Florida. I hope your stay at the Beale Beach Motor Inn is a pleasant one. Love, Trisha.

(Brent voices a series of possible responses.)

BRENT: I really like what you've done with the place... What's it like to clean motel rooms all day?... I'm seventeen, single white male, handsome, independent. *(Beat.)* I accidentally killed a girl—I just had to tell someone...

(He finally writes on the card.)

Dear Trisha, I appreciate your note. I am completely alone.

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