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MERMAID HOUR

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JUNE IS THE FIRST FALL by Yilong Liu

Synopsis: What compels people to cross mountains and seas to another country, another continent, and another culture to find their true selves? What are the journeys we take to find home and belonging? In *JUNE IS THE FIRST FALL*, Don, a gay Chinese man, returns home to Hawaii to rediscover missing memories of himself and his family that he moved away from. His week-long stay opens wounds with his father and sister that never healed, aggravating Don's struggle to find love and belonging in his life.

Cast Size: 3 Males, 2 Females

Mermaid Hour

by David Valdes

SAMPLE ONLY

Mermaid Hour received a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere at Borderlands Theater (Tucson, Arizona), Milagro Theater (Portland, Oregon), Mixed Blood Theater (Minneapolis, Minnesota)*, and Actor's Theater of Charlotte (Charlotte, North Carolina), from March to May 2018, featuring the following creative teams, listed in order of rolling production.

PILAR: Alida Holguin Gunn, Nelda Reyes, Thallis Santesteban, Adyana La Torre

BIRD: Sean William Dupont, Jed Arkley, Michael Hanna, Jeremy DeCarlos

VI: Jay Garcia, Jaryn Lasentia, Azoralla Arroyo Caballero, Toni Reali

JACOB: Eddie Diaz, Kai Hynes, Meng Xiong, Alec Celis

MIKA: Kat McIntosh, Barbie Wu, Sheena Jason, Amy Wada

MERPERSON/CRUX: Eddie Diaz, Michael Cavazos, Cat Hammond, Alex Aguilar

Directed by Glen Coffman, Sacha Reich, Leah Anderson, and Laley Lippard

*Featuring music by Eric Mayson

Setting:

The 2010s. A working class liberal-ish town in Massachusetts, well away from Boston.

A few items might suggest the Bardisa-Nickerson home, all elements should be easily moved or repurposed. There should be some anchors to locate the house but there should be ample open, transformational space onstage. It's not a kitchen sink drama. Their world, their child, their lives, are always on the edge of change.

Cast:

VIOLET BARDISA-NICKERSON, a girl assigned male at birth, 12 going on 15, mixed ethnicity.

BIRD NICKERSON, 30s, her dad, any race, working class with two jobs.

PILAR BARDISA, 30s, her mom, Cuban-American, nurse's aid on the way to being a nurse.

JACOB ENDO, Vi's crush, 12, Japanese-American.

MIKA ENDO, 40s, Jacob's mother, Japanese-American.

CRUX DUMAY/MERPERSON, 30s, genderqueer, not the same race as Bird.

The play is written for six actors. You may not undouble Crux/Merperson.

Race is not firmly prescribed for any of the roles, but the indications above are what I envision. Pilar should be played by a Latinx actor; the Endos should be played by Asian actors (you may change the family name and grandparents' city to match their origin if desired). The play may not be staged with an all-Caucasian cast without explicit written consent.

On casting VI: If you are not able to cast an actress that young, a high school student or very youthful college-aged student can work. Vi must be played by trans or genderqueer actor AMAB and the casting should not be taken lightly; preference is for a trans female actor, followed by a gender-nonconforming actor. Note: You may not cast a cisgender female actor, period, or a cisgender male actor who does not self-identify as gender queer or nonbinary.

CRUX must be play by an actor who is gender nonconforming (nonbinary, genderqueer, or trans); note that CRUX is not a drag queen.

Pronunciation notes:

Pilar is pronounced Pee-LAR (with the R rolled.)

“Mija” is run together as one word, pronounced mee-ha, Spanish for “my daughter.”

Mika is pronounced mee-ka.

MERMAID HOUR

SCENE ONE:

(The mid-2010s. A working-class liberal town nearish Boston. The home of the Bardisa-Nickersons.)

(BIRD comes into the living room with a six-pack of soda, followed by VI with plates and a blanket. They set up a picnic for 3 on the floor, VI's plate in the middle.)

VI: And THEN he told me about rainbow parties.

BIRD: Am I gonna want to know what a rainbow party is?

VI: *(Ah ha.)* You don't know? Ha! I bet Celia five bucks.

BIRD: You bet real money? That's stupid, honey.

VI: It's not stupid. I won \$5.

BIRD: *(Looks at set up.)* You forgot chopsticks.

VI: You get em.

BIRD: Setting the table's your job.

VI: *(Think she's clever.)* Yeah, but this is the floor.

BIRD: *(Oh yeah?)* We can eat at the table if you like.

VI: *(One more try.)* Thursday's TV picnic!

BIRD: Then don't be an asshole about table versus floor.

VI: *(Beat)* Fine. *(Not too grudging. They kinda love giving each other shit.)*

BIRD: *(To himself.)* Probably coulda skipped asshole. *(Whistles as he finishes set up.)*

VI: *(Back in with the chopsticks.)* So...

BIRD: Rainbow parties?

VI: Rainbow parties are when the same number of girls and boys go to a party and all the girls wear different color lipsticks and then, you know...

BIRD: I don't know.

VI: *(Makes an O shape with her mouth.)* And the winner is the boy with the most colors on his...

BIRD: Hold up.

VI: ...on his, you know. *(She mimes something going into a girl's mouth.)*

BIRD: You are seriously telling me this?

VI: You always say we can talk about anything!

BIRD: No, Mami says that, I just try to play along.

(PILAR enters in Nurse's Aide uniform, looking pooped, overloaded by carrying a shoulder bag, some groceries, and a bag of take-out boxes of Chinese food, which she hands off.)

VI: Fine, I'll ask Mami.

PILAR: Ask Mami in a minute.

(She exits with the grocery bag.)

BIRD: Now it's a question? A moment ago you were just telling me and it was bad enough.

VI: So...Does it count as sex?

BIRD: Of course it counts!

PILAR: *(Enters.)* Does what count?

VI: When a girl puts her lips on a guy's—

PILAR: *(Shoots BIRD a look.)* When what?

VI: *(Finally a little embarrassed but forging on.)* Not to... *(Can't say it.)* you know...Just to leave her color on it before the next girl.

PILAR: My god mija—why are you asking about rainbow parties?

BIRD: *(To PILAR.)* How do you know rainbow parties?

PILAR: *(To Bird, dismissive.)* Oprah. And parenting boards. *(To VI, serious.)* You know it's an urban legend, right?

VI: Celia said—

PILAR: Even if it was real, in what universe is it not sexual for girls to put a bunch of penises in their mouths?

VI: You don't have to say it like that!

PILAR: You brought it up.

VI: (*Trying to move forward.*) Celia says it counts because the girl's mouth isn't a virgin anymore but Jacob says it doesn't really count cause it's really quick and no one's really doing anything.

BIRD: Guess which one of those two still gets to come over?

PILAR: (*Supremely unruffled. She knows what she's doing.*) Beyond the fact that putting a penis in your mouth is like putting your mouth on a lollipop covered with potential viruses—(*VI recoils.*)

BIRD: Jeez, honey.

PILAR: Adolescent boys are famous for their terrible hygiene, which means you might be getting globs of old—

VI: (*What hell has she unleashed here?!*) STOP!

PILAR: Ok, ok. But you know this makes the girls toys for the boys while the boys get the big thrill.

BIRD: And we know you're all about girl power these days.

VI: “These days”?

PILAR: So the question isn’t “Does it count as sex?” but “Is it risky and demeaning?” Tell that to Celia and Jacob. (*Adopting her sage progressive mom voice.*) Sexual desire can be a wonderful thing when you’re ready—(*VI would love her to shut up.*)— but mija, I mean it: watch where you put your lips.

BIRD: —and your penis.

VI: DAD!

PILAR: Bird!

BIRD: I’m just saying. Either end of this stick, I don’t want you on it. You’re friggin’ 12 and you shouldn’t even be hearing about this shit, much less arguing the fine points.

VI: You guys freak out about every little thing I bring up!

PILAR: You never bring up anything little.

BIRD: It’s true. Tell me you cheated on a test, I beg you.

VI: NOW you’re ganging up on me!

PILAR: (*Trying to steer things light.*) We’re parents— that’s our job.

BIRD: And we’re good at it, right?

VI: (*Knows how to get them.*) Yeah, fine. You can have a kid who doesn't tell you about rainbow parties, you know. (*She gets up.*) The scallion pancakes are mine. (*Grabs them. Storms off.*)

BIRD: "Rainbow parties?"

PILAR: (*Mad.*) "Penis?"

BIRD: Well, she has one. I just wanna be clear: no rainbow nothing.

PILAR: But now you've made her regret telling us.

BIRD: I'm thinking your "penises dipped in horror" didn't help.

PILAR: (*Ignores that.*) Doctor Eggleston says she has to feel comfortable talking to us.

BIRD: Doctor Eggleston says a lot of things. (*A glare from Pilar. Looks through the boxes.*) They forgot the General Gau.

PILAR: (*Looks.*) And sent two cashew chicken. (*Groans. They love General Gau.*) Nothing can be easy.

BIRD: Do we still let her go to the Halloween Party?

PILAR: Why wouldn't we?

BIRD: How do we know it's not one of these rainbow jobs?

PILAR: It's all talk, Bird.

BIRD: *(Thinking about himself at 12.)* I wasn't. All talk.
(Looks off.) Do we start without her?

PILAR: It's *Project Runway*. She'll never forgive us if we do. *(They do a rock, paper, scissors. He loses, sighs, rises.)*

BIRD: If I don't come out in 10 minutes, I will you my crab Rangoon.

(Bird exits. Dark on living room.)

(Lights up on VI and JACOB imagined in their rooms. Both are on their phones. Their bodies should be positioned like they are facing each other and interacting with each other, but their eyes stay on their phones. Jacob is slender and lanky; a noodle of a cool kid, almost a year older than VI but in the same class, he reads queer.)

VI: Is Nguyen going to be there?

JACOB: Why? Do you like him?

VI: No! He smells like Axe!

JACOB: He's gay anyway.

VI: Huh?

JACOB: He so wanted to kiss me but I told him to grow up first.

VI: Duh. You're the same age.

JACOB: 12 is a massive year. Like, my 12 is to his 12 like 20 is to 15.

VI: What kind of 12 am I?

JACOB: You're a special case. (*Tiniest beat.*) Nguyen's not coming. His mom doesn't like my mom.

VI: I wish I had your mom. She's so...(*Pulling out high praise.*) sophisticated.

JACOB: (*Eyeball.*) What. Ever. (*Shrug.*) Your parents are cool. Well, your mom is. Did you ask about the shots again?

VI: Daddy freaks out, like breaks into a sweat. I'm trying to wait till we see Dr. Eggleston.

JACOB: That's a terrible name.

VI: She's nice!

JACOB: Could be worse; she could be Spermelston.

VI: You make fun of everything.

JACOB: So do you! You said Ms. Gupta's unibrow looks like someone underlined her forehead.

VI: She's the only one who gets me.

JACOB: I get you.

VI: Only grown-up. Around here. I wish I lived in New York. (*She says this like it's the promised land, but JACOB just snorts.*) What?

JACOB: Don't get mad but...

VI: (*Immediately upset.*) You think I'm not cool enough?

JACOB: Cool for this place, maybe, but...(*A shrug.*) I don't think you could handle it.

VI: You did!

JACOB: Um, yeah, but I was raised there—I knew the subway by third grade. You can't find your way to fifth period.

VI: That only happened once! (*A look from JACOB.*) Twice—but that was weeks ago!

JACOB: Face it. You're a small-town girl.

VI: Take that back!

JACOB: (*Doesn't. Grins and moves on.*) I heard it may snow this weekend.

VI: It'll kill my costume. I'll have to wear a hoodie or—

JACOB: We're not, like, trick or treating. It's all inside.

VI: I just wanted to look pretty the whole time.

JACOB: (*Casual.*) You always look pretty.

VI: (*Hopeful.*) I do?

JACOB: Duh. You're like, beautiful.

VI: Awwww...

JACOB: *(Eye roll.)* You're such a girl.

VI: Right?

(BIRD steps into the room, pissed.)

BIRD: Are you on the phone?

VI: No.

(VI hangs up and JACOB is plunged into darkness immediately.)

BIRD: Give me that. *(She does.)* What are the rules, Vi?

VI: He called me!

BIRD: I didn't ask. What are the rules?

VI: Phones only in public space. Mami says she only lets you have that rule so you feel better.

BIRD: Lemme guess. "He" is Jacob. Well, he helped you lose the phone for a day. Who feels what now?

VI: Daddy! The party's tomorrow night—I have to be able to text.

BIRD: You have a costume and your ride's all set—I don't think you do.

VI: *(Pulling a PILAR.)* We need a family meeting to talk about the phone rules. I'm 12 and this is getting a little old.

BIRD: You're not gonna get old if you keep this up. Phone is mine until the party. And if you complain—we can talk about the party, too.

VI: *(She knows she's lost this one.)* Daddyyyyy.

BIRD: *(Knows that she knows. Redirects.)* Project Runway's on. *(She wants to watch but doesn't want to relent.)* It's the Unconventional Materials challenge. *(He takes a step toward the door and then steps back.)* Don't be too pissed.

VI: *(Doesn't want to give in. Decides not to.)* I'm not. I'm tired

BIRD: *(Not sure how to read that.)* Ok...

VI: *(Big show of fake sleepiness; it's meant to look fake and he's meant to know she means it to. Yawns, yawns dramatically, stretches.)* I need my beauty sleep.

BIRD: Oh. Alright then. *(He kisses the top of her head but she pulls away.)* Alright.

(Lights down there and back up in living room.)

(PILAR is on her laptop, googling, like always. She leans in with interest. Shakes her head, or nods maybe, at whatever she sees. Pauses when BIRD crosses back in.)

PILAR: No?

BIRD: (*Mimics VI.*) “I need my beauty sleep.”

PILAR: I bet she thinks this is making you pay.

BIRD: It kind of is. Thursdays are fun. (*Shrugs.*) Is your laptop coming to TV Picnic?

PILAR: You weren't here, so I—

BIRD: I know.

PILAR: I was checking out the new links from Eggleston.

BIRD: She gets to come to TV Picnic too?

PILAR: (*A dig.*) One of us has to read up on this.

BIRD: And look at that: one of us is. All the time. (*Beat.*) D'you ask Eggleston my question?

PILAR: It was embarrassing.

BIRD: Bet she's heard worse. So?

PILAR: Yes, I did, and, like I said: children this sure never go back.

BIRD: Never or hardly ever?

PILAR: She sent me a link. There were studies in Holland.

BIRD: You learned Dutch!

PILAR: If you'd even glance at the internet, you could learn a thing or two.

BIRD: Does porn count?

PILAR: (*Holds up her tablet.*) Any time you want, I've bookmarked all the links.

BIRD: And they all say it's safe?

PILAR: (*Clicks on one.*) This girl started puberty blockers at exactly Vi's age. And she went to the same guy at Children's Hospital that Eggleston likes.

BIRD: (*Pressing ahead.*) They all say it's safe?

PILAR: And look at her!

BIRD: They don't. Or you'd answer me.

PILAR: Ay querrido, you're just trying to look ignorant.

BIRD: Because I don't trust the internet? Last year, you were sure you had ALS because your arm was tired.

PILAR: Tired and weak, and a little, I don't know, something.

BIRD: Because you googled the early warning signs, which are also the same warning signs that you had just worked a double at the nursing home.

PILAR: Just look at her, ok? (*He takes the tablet.*) Isn't she pretty?

BIRD: (*Looks but then gets distracted by what he sees.*) Wait—is this the cost? (*Holds it toward her, then looks again.*) MONTHLY?

PILAR: Health care is expensive.

BIRD: Will insurance cover this?

PILAR: (*Shrugs.*) Some or all. I'm figuring it out.

BIRD: Your plan has a huge deductible. Kill me now.

PILAR: At least my job offers health insurance.

BIRD: Ok, after we shell out two thousand bucks so Vi can look pretty in a dress, will your plan cover the other ten months? Or do I need a third lousy job?

PILAR: Really, this is about the money?

BIRD: We're adults. Who live in America. Everything is about the money. (*Softer.*) Peel, think about this. We have no savings. We skipped summer vacation because my shifts got cut to half. She's taking guitar instead of violin cause it's the instrument we have lying around.

PILAR: I'm working as much as I can.

BIRD: That's not the point.

PILAR: What is?

BIRD: The point—(*Stops.*)

PILAR: Go ahead.

BIRD: The money, the safety, the friggin' everything. It's clicking on a picture of a kid who was once someone's little boy and saying how pretty she looks and

wondering, does he still have his junk? Or did they cut it off? It's living in a world where I'm thinking, did they cut it off? It's cutting it off.

PILAR: *(Trying to solve this.)* Querrido, it's just shots to buy us time.

BIRD: *(Not relenting.)* Until they cut it off.

PILAR: *(Now she's over it.)* Do you hear yourself? *(He shrugs.)* Someday, she's going to grow up and fall in love and get married--

BIRD: Not if she's smart.

PILAR: *(Blowing by that.)*—and when you walk her down the aisle and she is happy in who she is, none of that is going matter. *(He is simmering and doesn't reply. She thinks maybe she's got him. She gets up, starts packing up the Chinese.)* We're lucky to live in a time where we can look this up ourselves. Imagine how hard it used to be! *(Exits.)*

BIRD: *(To himself, looking at the last page left open.)* Yeah, cause it's SO easy now. *(Lights down.)*

(VI's room, a little later. She is staring into the dark until a patch of light illuminates the MERPERSON. Their appearance should be majestic, beautiful, eerie, and even a little unsettling all at once. They should have something approximating a fantastic tail. They are not a garden-variety mermaid, not easily gendered or sexualized; they are beautiful in a way that doesn't conform to norms, but instead capitalizes most on the graces of the performer. They radiate with self-confidence and warmth.)

(At this point, the audience should have no idea from where this vision comes. The language is poetic and the MERPERSON means every word.)

MERPERSON: *(Out.)* Arise, my loves.

You are the children of beauty and light, the gift of the heavens that cover both the land and the sea.

Never kneel before the earth, never waste your tears on ground that does not welcome you.

Arise and be all that you are, all that I am.

I was a girl a long time ago. I was a boy a long time ago.
I was a mortal a long time ago.

I am not mortal!
I am not land or sea! I am heavens.

The secret of our kind is that we are not in between, but above.

See how I shine!
(A brilliant light effect should dazzle us for a moment.)
See how I glow in the Mermaid Hour!
Glow, my children! Glow!

(Lights out on the MERPERSON.)

End scene.

SCENE TWO:

(Halloween. Lights up on VIOLET wearing a long green mermaid tail topped with a big fuzzy purple hoodie to ward off the cold. Her hair is hidden beneath a red wig that tumbles past her shoulders and she has a starfish hair clip. At her feet we see a sparkly shoulder bag.)

(PILAR is kneeling, working on the costume, hand-sewing on the last sequins as fast as she can. She looks frazzled. VI's phone is next to the sewing kit.)

VI: They'll be here in like seconds!

PILAR: I'm trying sweetheart.

VI: It's going to look unfinished.

PILAR: Mija, it's a needle and thread and sequins: you could have done it yourself.

VI: You hate it when I get in your sewing kit.

PILAR: *(True enough.)* I do. *(VIOLET turns a little as if looking in a mirror.)* Honey—you cannot move and expect me to finish this.

VI: *(Touching the wig, which is a little voluminous and curly.)* Does this look hoochy?

PILAR: "Hoochy?" *(It kind of does.)* You begged for it long enough.

VI: I want better hair.

PILAR: Everyone does. (*Time to lie a little.*) It's pretty.

VI: If we lived in New York City, you could get good wigs at like the drug store.

PILAR: Yeah? Who says?

VI: Jacob. He says drag queens used to buy all their stuff at the pharmacy on his block. (*With utter disdain.*) It's not like here.

PILAR: How do we stand it? (*Pulling a stitch through.*)

VI: Right? It was boring before Jacob.

PILAR: What's he going as?

VI: The Wolf.

PILAR: There's a wolf in Little Mermaid?

VI: Duh. It's not a theme party. He's THE wolf, like Big Bad.

PILAR: What about Celia? And STOP MOVING!

VI: She was going to be Little Red Riding Hood but her mom said not if Jacob was a wolf. Isn't that stupid?

PILAR: (*Doesn't answer. Sits back.*) Done. Thank god.

VI: (*Spinning the conversation away and spinning her tail. Thrilled.*) Awww, it shines!

PILAR: It ought to, I herniated a disc for it.

VI: You're the best. THE best.

PILAR: Can I get that in writing? *(Looks at watch.)* Let's get some pictures before you go.

VI: *(Hops down.)* I'm good.

PILAR: I'll be quick.

VI: Probably should wait for them out front anyway.

PILAR: I did all that work, you really think it's not going on Facebook?

VI: Celia's dad has the good camera.

PILAR: Mija, I'm not asking for a kidney here. Come on. *(Goes to unzip the hoodie.)*

VI: You can't just do that, I'm 12!

PILAR: *(Gets it)* Ok. *(Steps back.)* You do it. Right now. *(A stand-off.)*

VI: I'm not a baby.

PILAR: Open it.

(VI stands with her back facing us. Only PILAR can see the front of the hoodie.)

VI: *(Unzips partway. In self-defense.)* Celia's costume has a mini-skirt and fishnets.

PILAR: *(Sees the front view we can't.)* OH MY GOD.

(VI unzips, so hoodie is fully open toward her mom.)

VI: *(Defiant)* I'm a MERMAID.

PILAR: A clam shell bra. Really? You think there's any chance of me letting you leave here in a bra and nothing else?

VI: And a tail! Bra and a tail! It's what she wears, Mami!

PILAR: I say yes to a lot of things but I'm not letting a 12-year-old leave here in a bra.

VI: *(Reaching up under the hoodie from behind, unclasps the clam bra, which she drops. PILAR now has a view of a bare chest. VI is defiant.)* How about this? That better?

(We hear a car horn.)

PILAR: Where's the top I made?

VI: In my bag. But it's not what she wears!

PILAR: I can call Celia's dad: "Hi, sorry you're in the driveway but we've had a change of plans."

VI: You're such a prude!

PILAR: "Prude"? Did you get that from a vocab test?

(VI scoops up her bag and stomps off.)

VI: I hate you.

(We hear a ding. VI's phone gets a text. PILAR reads it.)

PILAR: “We’re here. No rush obvi.” Right, the honking and the text are just for fun.

VI: *(Back in view in the top PILAR made.)* Clams on top at least? *(PILAR hesitates.)* Please? Please.

(PILAR knows that this can be a win. She helps VI put the clams on over the shirt. They’re both happier and PILAR uses the moment to snap a really sweet selfie of them together. VI breaks the pose first, grabs her bag and hoodie, and starts to head off.)

PILAR: Here’s your phone. *(Hands it to her.)* Call me if you need anything.

VI: You mean call you if anything goes horribly horribly wrong.

PILAR: Your words, kiddo.

VI: *(Kisses PILAR. Helpful.)* You know, some of my friends’ moms...take pills for anxiety.

PILAR: *(PILAR scoops the discarded hoodie up off the floor.)* Some have housekeepers too.

VI: *(Inspiration for a joke.)* Wait: who picks up the mess at King Triton’s?

PILAR: Who does what? *(Gets it.)* The mer-Maid. Good one.

VI: I know, right? *(Exits.)*

(Lights up across the stage on the kitchen bar, where BIRD is prepping a salad. He has an open beer, nearly finished, and a closed beer. A glass of wine and bottle wait for PILAR. There are Whole Foods bags on the counter. PILAR crosses to him, the lights going out where she'd been.)

BIRD: She's off, yeah?

PILAR: Ay, Celia's dad and the honking! The man never learned manners.

BIRD: *(Nods at the bag.)* Get lost on your way home tonight?

PILAR: I knew you'd say that

BIRD: Star Market's just up the street.

PILAR: *(She takes out some items that remain in the bag—plantains, blueberries, two heads of cauliflower.)* You can't just buy vegetables anywhere. *(She pulls out a small cake in a pretty box.)*

BIRD: Yeah? Is cake a vegetable?

PILAR: You really want a Star Market cake?

BIRD: At Star Market prices, sure. Unless we became the 1 % and you didn't tell me.

PILAR: It's *date night*.

BIRD: You bring me to all the nicest places. *(He finishes the salad, sets down the knife.)*

PILAR: We have three or four hours with no Vi and we don't even have to pay a sitter. We deserve cake that doesn't taste like Star Market. *(She takes cutting board.)* What's making you so grumpy?

BIRD: Supplier at work is being a dick. My daughter has a crush on a boy who knows about rainbow parties. *(Nods at the cutting board where she has set cauliflower.)* Cauliflower on date night.

PILAR: I know, I know. But it was on sale at Whole Foods and I saw it and thought—

BIRD: “Bird hates Cauliflower”?

PILAR: No—“When was the last time we had cauliflower?” And you don't hate it, not globally. You like it when I bake it all covered in cheese and breadcrumbs.

BIRD: I'll eat anything covered in cheese and breadcrumbs.

PILAR: I just haven't cooked that sort of thing lately because of all the fat and empty calories. Why do that to myself when I'm trying to eat right? And I really am, not that you can tell.

BIRD: I can.

PILAR: Really?

BIRD: The cake is small. And the cauliflower is huge.

PILAR: *(Deflated)* Oh.

BIRD: I was kidding. (*Thinks this will help prove he noticed.*) Your blue sweater's less tight now—

PILAR: (!?!) What?

BIRD: (*Unwisely finishing the thought in his head.*)—
though I don't see how cake helps.

PILAR: (*Furiously splits the cauliflower. Muttering.*) “All things in moderation,” Bird, that's what they say. (*Not looking at him.*) Maybe apply that theory to opening your mouth.

BIRD: Whoa. Who's grumpy now?

PILAR: (*Waves the knife.*) I'm not grumpy, I'm tense. The stuff with the shots—

BIRD: Here we go.

PILAR: I can't say how I'm feeling?

BIRD: Welcome to my world.

PILAR: You're kidding me.

BIRD: I got like one minute to say how I was and then you were busy defending your crap taste in vegetables.

PILAR: You started it.

BIRD: You set me up—I hate cauliflower.

PILAR: Oh my god, querrido, you're on to me! I do, I go to Whole Foods just looking for things to piss you off.

BIRD: Good to have a skill.

(He drinks. She chops cauliflower until it's useless Sweeps the florets into the trash. Between peace offering and guilt trip.)

PILAR: We can order take out.

BIRD: You still want to eat with me?

PILAR: Despite you being a lousy date? *(He shrugs. She shrugs. This is a yes.)*

BIRD: *(Pulls out phone.)* Kebab House? Golden Raj?

PILAR: You choose. I'm having cake.

BIRD: I'll go pick it up. No need to pay extra.

PILAR: Sure. *(Doesn't look at him.)*

BIRD: Night doesn't have to be lost.

(She manages a tight smile but leaves it there. He hesitates and then exits. She stares at the cake.)

End scene.

SCENE THREE:

(Across the stage, lights up on VI and JACOB in heated discussion. VI has been crying.)

VI: But your mom said she was cool with me!

JACOB: She is. Usually.

VI: Make her stop Jacob—please!

JACOB: I can't make her do anything.

VI: They're going to flip out.

JACOB: She's already on the phone.

VI: She told me I was beautiful when I got here.

JACOB: What does that have to do with it?

VI: But she really just thinks I'm a freak!

JACOB: Vi, she saw.

VI: *(Stubborn.)* We didn't do anything. You were just showing me!.

JACOB: *(Can't believe she's being so dense.)* Um, yeah, my junk.

VI: Doesn't she know anything? *(Too loud.)* My doctor says sex play is normal.

JACOB: Don't call it sex!

VI: You're yelling at me!

JACOB: Oh my God, Vi, I wish you'd stayed home!

VI: I hate you.

JACOB: *(Crestfallen.)* I didn't mean it. *(He waits. Waits.)*
Now say you didn't. *(Beat. VI is silent.)* Come on, Vi.

VI: If I was a boy, just gay, would you like me better?

JACOB: That's stupid.

VI: It's not stupid. *(Beat.)* I don't hate you.

JACOB: *(Grinning.)* Yeah. I figured. *(Then quieter.)* Your doctor really said to do stuff with your friends?

VI: Well....

JACOB: *(Dammit! He'd really hoped it was true.)* Oh.

VI: I read it online. But I'm pretty sure it's *so* normal.

(We hear a car door slam and the beep of a lock. The kids both react and then head off away from the sound, miserable.)

(To one side of the stage, not too close to the kids, we see an elegant woman, Jacob's mother MIKA, dressed in expensive casual wear. If she hadn't sworn off smoking after her time abroad, she'd be smoking now.)

MIKA: Hi guys. *(She smiles nervously at them.)* The kids are in the TV room. I thought we should—

PILAR: He can't lock the door to his own room?

MIKA: Not with another boy behind it, no. *(She says boy without even realizing it. PILAR quietly clocks it.)*

BIRD: My mother had the same rule for my sister.

PILAR: That's different.

BIRD: Yeah? We don't let Vi have a cel phone in hers.

MIKA: *(Trying to steer them back to her.)* And for good reason. *(Pulling a bit of a lecture.)* Let's face it, kids are thinking about sex all the time now. I support Jacob unconditionally, but I don't have to facilitate early... activity.

PILAR: He's 12. It's not that early --

MIKA: *(Shoots her a look.)* I can be the "cool mom" without opening a Love Shack for Tween Boys.

BIRD: I should hope!

PILAR: I don't see how this applies to Vi. She's not a boy and they're not lovebirds trying to hook up.

MIKA: That's certainly not how it looked.

BIRD: How it looked?

MIKA: I do have a key, of course, and the door was open before they could get their pants up—his pants, and Vi's tail or whatever.

PILAR: They were having sex?

MIKA: No! I— I don't know exactly what they were doing, but trust me, I can be upset well short of sex.

BIRD: The little shit.

MIKA: Jacob's no worse than—

BIRD: I meant Vi. She's always riding us for setting limits and not trusting her and then she comes over here and proves us right.

MIKA: *(Relieved)* Okay then.

PILAR: Wait a minute. So they were just showing off their equipment? The way kids do—the way I did to my cousins after my older sister's quinceañera? *(To Bird)* The way you showed, what was her name, Ruthie Ann, when you were, 10 was it? I don't remember you mentioning your parents calling you a shit.

BIRD: They didn't find out — or there'd have been hell to pay.

PILAR: Too bad Vi didn't have your luck.

MIKA: *(Stunned)* I get the appeal of being Little Miss Progressive, but you are not seriously telling me you are ok with our kids doing whatever they want behind closed doors.

(PILAR doesn't answer.)

BIRD: I'm not.

PILAR: She didn't ask you. *(To MIKA.)* You know what, I am. What's going to happen? To use your term, the "boys" – yes, I heard that – aren't going to get pregnant. So what on earth is safer than playing with a best friend raised by smart people? Or do you want Jacob to start with some older guy you don't even know?

MIKA: How about Jacob doesn't start with anything yet but information and his left hand?

BIRD: Sounds about right to me.

PILAR: For god sake, both of you – they're kids. They're going to play at sex anyway.

MIKA: Not in my house.

PILAR: I respect that—

MIKA: *(Cutting her off.)* And not in yours.

BIRD: Uh huh.

MIKA: They can see each other at school and activities, obviously, but it's pretty clear we don't agree on limits, so I'd rather not set us up for more conflict.

PILAR: Can you not see that you're about to make Vi the girl of Jacob's dreams?

MIKA: It's my job to make sure she stays only in his dreams. He's 12, Pilar! I love Vi— and I *(This is a stretch.)* really enjoy you guys—but I have one kid and I'm going to do right by him even if you don't get it. That's my job.

BIRD: (*Impressed.*) Huh. (*Both women look at him. He shrugs. To MIKA.*) You're from New York—I just figured you'd out-liberal us.

PILAR: (*Chilly.*) Have you shared this edict of yours with the kids?

MIKA: Pilar—

PILAR: It should be you, right? I doubt Little Miss Progressive will say the right thing.

MIKA: (*Shoots BIRD a look.*) Bird, help me out here—

(*Before he can reply, PILAR shoots him a look that says, DO NOT DARE.*)

BIRD: Better just get them.

(*All three exit. Black.*)

End scene.

SCENE FOUR:

(Back at the Bardisa-Nickerson house. Later. VI sits in her room, wig off but nearby. She is miserable. Then she sits up and taps the air in front of her. Instantly, the MERPERSON appears; she is actually watching them on YouTube. NOTE: The actor is to be staged live, not recorded.)

MERPERSON: *(Out.)* Arise, my loves.

How special you are! How special am I!
I have a tail
that parts the waves with grace and speed.
Scales that ripple when I dive and shimmer when I
surface.

I am Mer!
I am beauty and magic
and not of mere land or only sea.

Nor are you
My beautiful ones.
Not of mere land or only sea. Not of mere land or only
sea.

You are beyond. You--
Are boundless.

(A shift in tone. Bright.) If you enjoyed today's Mermaid Hour, comment, "like," and share! And remember: it's not too late to submit your entry for the Be Your Own Merperson Challenge. Make a movie, make a difference!

(VI smiles, taps the air, and the MERPERSON is gone.)

(Lights up in the living room, where PILAR is obsessing over her computer, watching something online, with headphones on to keep from waking anyone. BIRD enters, watches a moment.)

BIRD: You gonna be on that thing all night?

PILAR: There's a whole series about a family like us.

BIRD: Yeah? They have an oversexed mermaid?

PILAR: It's comforting. I'm learning a lot.

BIRD: Come to bed.

PILAR: There are only four more episodes.

BIRD: Well then, you have no choice. *(PILAR turns it back on. He's a little pissed, she knows it, and he knows she knows it. But still.)* Jeezus. *(He exits.)*

(She looks briefly back toward where he'd been and watches her show. She looks content for a moment but then she learns something from the show that we can't hear and sits up straight.)

(Whatever it is, it's having a negative affect—we see it clearly in how she breathes and a look on her face that bears little of her usual confidence.)

(She stops the playback. She sits, trying to take in what she has seen. Maybe she paces. We still don't know why. But we can tell she's wrecked.)

(She sags, defeated, drops her head into her hands.)

PILAR: Goddammit.

End scene.

SAMPLE ONLY

SCENE FIVE:

(The next day. MIKA, in expensive, of-the-moment activewear, enters with a gym bag slung over her shoulder. She has a fancy water in one hand and a smart phone in the other. Like everyone, she walks and stares at her screen. She frowns, stops, and then dials.)

MIKA: *(Her greeting is a terse staccato of three full names, never a good sign.)* Jacob. Hiro. Endo. *(Beat.)* \$600 sneakers? *(Beat.)* I don't care if they're signed by Van Gogh. *(Beat.)* You better not have them on your feet and, if you do, I hope you've only walked on air, because we are going to the post office to return them right now. *(Beat.)* "Late for soccer"? I don't know whose mother you think you're talking to, but that is a complete misreading of the situation.

(She hangs up and doesn't see PILAR entering from the opposite side, looking at a stack of forms. She doesn't see MIKA either, until they're almost upon one another. Neither is delighted.)

MIKA: Pilar.

PILAR: Mika.

(Tight smiles all around.)

MIKA: Are you joining Pumped?

PILAR: *(Brays.)* Right after I win Powerball and quit my job. *(Hears herself.)* I mean—*(Beat)* My doctor's in this complex. *(Waves the forms as if they're proof.)* Not mine. Vi's.

MIKA: Eggleston, right? I've heard she's very well considered.

PILAR: She's great! She's breaking up with us but other than that—

MIKA: Breaking up?

PILAR: The doctor equivalent. "It's not you, it's me."
Says she feels underqualified.

MIKA: Ah—

PILAR: Wants us to see some endocrinologist at Children's—

MIKA: Seems reasonable.

PILAR: —who doesn't know Vi! I don't want to turn her over to strangers!

MIKA: Strangers who do this for a living. (*Lecture voice.*)
You just have to trust—

PILAR: You're an expert on trust? You don't even let Jacob lock his door!

MIKA: Ok—

PILAR: At least the bathroom door locks, right? He's got to masturbate somewhere.

MIKA: (*Steel.*) You've known me for all of six months. So you don't know that I'm nobody's punching bag. I get it—rough stuff going on—but I'm not your

difficulty. I'm going to exit gracefully now and let you rave at the next person who needs to get to the parking lot.

PILAR: Oh god—sorry. Please don't go.

MIKA: I have to get Jacob—

PILAR: Please. I'm usually the calm one on this, ok? I know that's not how it looks. (*The truth begins to spill out. MIKA chooses to stay.*) We've been headed here for years, years, right? And it's been my job to understand it, to make it ok, and it's been ok. I watched the movie with that other girl and her family and I read all the *New York Times* articles until I have a handle on things. Or I think I do, and then I read some new impossible thing. So I find a way to take that in and keep on going. Reading blogs and watching TV shows and boom, I stumble onto another thing and start again.

MIKA: Pilar—

PILAR: (*She can't stop. Out it comes.*) Like...if she does puberty blockers and hormone replacement, she'll... she'll be sterile.

MIKA: Wow.

PILAR: I asked Doctor Eggleston if that was true, and she was surprised I didn't know. It was like she was talking to a child. (*Does a doctor impression.*) "You can't skip puberty and be fertile." Isn't it wild? I hadn't, I don't know, even thought about that until a mom on TV mentioned it.

MIKA: It must have been quite a shock.

PILAR: (*Is that dig? Pilar thinks so.*) Think about everything you've had to learn about gay kids so you can help Jacob—and now imagine—(*grasping for an analogy.*) imagine discovering that when he comes out, he'll lose an eye!

MIKA: (*Takes the analogy literally.*) I don't know—an eye is visible.

PILAR: Mika!

MIKA: And I'd probably find a way to deal with it. That's how I am.

PILAR: (*Pushing ahead.*) Missing such a big detail for so long got me thinking. What else am I missing? And then I started to wonder, how many other moms like me thought they had this down to a science and then... didn't? I started googling the numbers. Do you know many parents say yes to the hormones versus how many say no? Do you?

MIKA: I'm supposed to say "no" here, right?

PILAR: Nobody knows. I looked and looked and that is a fact no one has posted. All the feel good stuff I can find. But the doubts—nobody runs the numbers on doubt.

MIKA: We're parents. Second-guessing is what we do.

PILAR: "We?" There's no "we" around here—I don't know anyone going through this.

MIKA: Well, then “I” will just go, not having any useful perspective.

PILAR: I’m sorry. I’m not like this.

MIKA: *(Acid.)* You are this week.

(MIKA exits. PILAR lets out a long sigh. Heads off the other way. End scene.)

End scene.

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