

SORROW OF THE SEA MAIDENS

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*“Having been born so often,
I have salty experience,
like creatures of the sea
with a passion for stars
and an earthly destination.
And so I move without knowing
to which world I’ll be returning
or if I’ll go on living.”*

Pablo Neruda

*“With data on the best known underwater vertebrate species,
we can put the fraction of species disappearing each year at upward
of one thousand times the rate that existed before the coming of humans.”*

Edward O. Wilson

CHARACTERS:

(four women and two men)

MIRABELLE FONTAINE, an Afro-Caribbean doula; mid-twenties and mid-forties

GWENDOLYN WELLES, an Anglo-American conservation biologist; mid-thirties

MARLIN WELLES, her husband, an Anglo-American molecular biologist; mid-thirties

FINOOLA WELLES, Gwendolyn's cloned chimera as a fetus and infant

DOCTOR HURLEIGH SWALES, an Afro-British physician; mid-thirties and fifties

ORMA SETIMBA, an Afro-Caribbean housemaid and cook; twenties

NERISSA BAPTISTE, Mirabelle's adopted daughter; mid-teens

Suggested doubling: Finoola Welles / Nerissa Baptiste

TIME:

The present and twenty years beyond

PLACE:

The West Indies: the fictitious island nation of Dolphina, in close proximity to Jamaica. A stylized set represents a bedroom, an office, a parlor, a careworn porch, a laboratory with a large aquarium, and the coastline and depths of the Caribbean Sea.

ACT I

(Twenty years in the future, on the West Indies Island of Dolphina, the howling winds of a rainstorm rise to a crescendo, then dwindle as lights reveal MIRABELLE FONTAINE, an Afro-Caribbean woman in her forties, her hair wrapped in a bandana. SHE addresses the audience from a lectern, speaking with a Caribbean accent.)

MIRABELLE

Here I stand before this illustrious assembly, before all you scientists and politicians who have come despite the storms drowning Dolphina. There are rumors that these cruel winds have cracked my coconut, but I tell you I can see beyond them to the kinder winds of the past, to when Orma first heard that cry in the night.

(A chilling wail resounds in darkness as GWENDOLYN WELLES weeps in her bedroom. The voices of her husband, MARLIN, and their Afro-Caribbean housemaid, ORMA SETIMBA, are heard.)

GWENDOLYN

Ohhhhhhhhhh...

MARLIN

Gwen...?

GWENDOLYN

Stop! Don't turn on the lights!

MARLIN

What's wrong?! Are you all right?!

GWENDOLYN

Don't move! Stay where you are!

ORMA

Please, Madam, let us see!

GWENDOLYN

No! Not yet!

MARLIN

For chrissake...

GWENDOLYN

Shhhhh -- listen! The rain woke me. I was thirsty, so I switched on the lamp and reached for my glass of water. I looked down at my...my hands, then into the mirror...

MARLIN

What...? Show me!

ORMA

Please, Madam, let me turn on the lights.

GWENDOLYN

Wait! Just a minute. *(pause)* All right, now!

(Lights reveal GWENDOLYN standing before them in a night shirt, the pale flesh of her face and body covered with a silvery iridescence.)

ORMA

My god...

MARLIN

Jesus...

GWENDOLYN

You see it then? I'm not dreaming?

MARLIN

No.

ORMA

Yemanja!

MARLIN

How...how do you feel?

GWENDOLYN

Scared. Don't come near me!

MARLIN

Get dressed! We'll drive to the hospital.

GWENDOLYN

No! I...I can't leave like this. Call a doctor, call Hurleigh Swales. Tell him to come here.

MARLIN

What should I say?

GWENDOLYN

Your wife needs help.

ORMA

Your wife's got the glitters, man, a raging rash of glitters!

(Suddenly HURLEIGH SWALES, an Afro-British doctor, appears, as if windswept into the room.)

GWENDOLYN

Let's hope I'm not...

GWENDOLYN

...contagious.

DOCTOR SWALES

Contagious...?

DOCTOR SWALES

Not likely. It appears to be vesicular lesions suffused with flecks of mica, like a new strain of eczema or a dusting by fairies. Does it itch?

GWENDOLYN

No.

DOCTOR SWALES

I want you to write down everything you've had to eat or drink in the past two weeks, and every place you've been.

GWENDOLYN

I'm either here or the lab next door, and the beach where I swim.

ORMA

Yes, Madam swims every morning at dawn, never misses a day, not a day.

DOCTOR SWALES

(testing her blood pressure) Now hold out your arm.

GWENDOLYN

I hope it's not affecting the baby.

DOCTOR SWALES

You're pregnant...?

GWENDOLYN

Nearly six months.

DOCTOR SWALES

You certainly don't look it. Why haven't you come to see me before now?

GWENDOLYN

I called, but you're always busy, so I went to Alima Thalassa.

DOCTOR SWALES

Then you've had an amniocentesis...?

GWENDOLYN

Yes, everything's fine, and we know it's a girl.

DOCTOR SWALES

If Alima's your doctor, why didn't you call her?

GWENDOLYN

She resents Americans, and I'd rather see you anyway.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, since you have the equipment here, let's take a biopsy of your skin. I'll also need a list of the chemical contents of your laboratory. You're working with fish, aren't you?

ORMA

Yemanja.

DOCTOR SWALES

You really shouldn't say that -- not here in the house.

GWENDOLYN

Say what? What's "Yemanja?"

ORMA

The she-spirit of oceans, a powerful spirit, very powerful.

DOCTOR SWALES

Most islanders believe in Obeah; it's Afro-Caribbean sorcery. Orma thinks you're under some sort of spell, right, Orma?

ORMA

Definitely, no doubt about it, none at all.

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Gwendolyn) Can you drive to my clinic? You'll need a thorough exam.

GWENDOLYN

No! I can't be seen like this. *(to Marlin)* Shouldn't we tell him?

MARLIN

Not yet.

GWENDOLYN

I don't think we have much choice.

MARLIN

Orma, would you please leave?

ORMA

Okay, but there's something you should know -- that baby, Mister Welles, she's already got a soul.

MARLIN

Later, Orma.

ORMA

It's an old soul she has, a very old soul.

(ORMA departs.)

MARLIN

God, these people are insane. Now listen, Hurleigh, we need your assurance that everything said here will be kept confidential.

DOCTOR SWALES

Absolutely -- our code of honor.

MARLIN

(to Gwendolyn) You tell him.

GWENDOLYN

As you know, both Marlin and I are molecular biologists. Our specialty is coding marine species, but geneticists in every field are interrelated. Since it's possible to extract undesirable genes, we've protected our child from susceptibility to cancers, autism, arthritis, and she won't be obese or myopic.

MARLIN

She'll also be musical since Gwen's a former prodigy. She played first violin with the New York Philharmonic.

DOCTOR SWALES

Really? So are you saying you've found the talent gene...?

GWENDOLYN

No, but my DNA was injected into an oocum and implanted in my uterus. In other words, my genes will be hers.

DOCTOR SWALES

So the baby's a clone?

GWENDOLYN

A clone variant -- this is our ninth attempt. Three female gametes matured to embryos, but this is the first viable fetus.

MARLIN

Poor Hurliegh looks stunned.

DOCTOR SWALES

How can I not? I'm in awe, of course. I've heard of these customized babies, but it strikes me as... *(pause)* Sorry, but is it really wise to determine a child's destiny?

GWENDOLYN

We think she'll be grateful. *(pause)* Look, even if you don't approve, please say you'll be my doctor. I need you, Hurliegh, and so will she. There's no one else here we trust.

DOCTOR SWALES

(pause, he sighs) All right, but I have hundreds of patients dependent on me, so I can only give you a limited amount of time.

GWENDOLYN

Fine.

DOCTOR SWALES

First, I'd advise an ultrasound. I have a portable machine, so I'll come round.

GWENDOLYN

Do you think something's seriously wrong?

DOCTOR SWALES

Aside from the obvious, your blood pressure's low, your temperature's subnormal, and you should have gained twenty pounds by now. If you look in the mirror, you'll see your pupils are dilated. Are you taking drugs?

GWENDOLYN

No, only vitamins and coffee.

DOCTOR SWALES

Limit the coffee. Anything you haven't told me?

GWENDOLYN

Sometimes I have trouble sleeping.

DOCTOR SWALES

Anything else?

MARLIN

She eats raw fish!

DOCTOR SWALES

Which fish?

GWENDOLYN

Clams and mussels.

MARLIN

Grunt, grouper, tuna, and anything that swims!

DOCTOR SWALES

Good lord.

MARLIN

I've told her not to, but she won't listen.

DOCTOR SWALES

You of all people know fish attract parasites.

MARLIN

It started last week.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, stop this instant! Otherwise your child's at risk for deformities and toxoplasmosis. Are your glands swollen?

GWENDOLYN

No.

DOCTOR SWALES

Any nausea? Muscle aches?

GWENDOLYN

No, I'm fine.

DOCTOR SWALES

Starting now, make certain any meat you eat is well cooked, and no fish of any kind! You'll need plenty of fresh vegetables, and the melons here are superb. Try to avoid the lab, read bucolic novels, and continue swimming. I'm going to give you an antibiotic and a natural sedative. (*packing his equipment*) You know you can get better care in the States, so why are you still here?

GWENDOLYN

It was Marlin's idea.

MARLIN

I researched every island in the West Indies. We wanted isolation, someplace away from any legal constraints.

DOCTOR SWALES

So you came to our end of the world?

GWENDOLYN

We came to where the future of the world could be shaped.

MARLIN

We're still getting used to the sluggish pace and humidity.

GWEDNOLYN

What I admire most is Dolphina's diversity -- all these ethnicities living in harmony. Of course, we've only been here ten months.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, I've been here ten years. Trust me, Dolphina's as fragile as the rest of the world.

GWENDOLYN

Maybe, but no one can deny it's beauty. The sand's so white, it's blinding; the water's pristine with no shortage of specimens; and best of all, it's legal to work on germline engineering.

DOCTOR SWALES

Just don't engineer us out of existence.

GWENDOLYN

How can you say that?! We're not the ones slashing and burning the planet! Isn't it better to try to comprehend the world? To conceive superior children who might cope with all the madness, who might even have the good sense to stop it?

DOCTOR SWALES

Sorry, I prefer the lottery, or maybe I'm not as pessimistic.

GWENDOLYN

Or well informed. Marlin and I are studying the major mass extinctions, and in case you're not aware of it, we're in the middle of another.

DOCTOR SWALES

Not soon I hope.

GWENDOLYN

The planet's heating up faster than anyone predicted. Every year, oceans are rising which means land mass is shrinking, glaciers melting, more hurricanes and droughts. Top that with the fact that we're depleting our great predators -- our sharks, skates, and rays. By 2050 one quarter of all the planet's mammals will be gone. Of course, you've heard all this; you'd have to live in a cave not to know what's happening, though flooding our Gulf Coast states wasn't enough. People won't wake up till the whole of Manhattan's submerged!

DOCTOR SWALES

So these extinctions inspired your...experiment?

GWENDOLYN

If we're going to give birth, we want our child to be smarter than we are. Think about it, Hurleigh: haven't you ever wished you'd been born without your flaws?

DOCTOR SWALES

(smiling) What flaws...?

GWENDOLYN

Your propensity for addiction -- you know what I mean.

MARLIN

Gwen!

DOCTOR SWALES

She means I'm a rummy, though I haven't touched a drop in years.

GWENDOLYN

But what if you could have avoided the battle? What if it had never been an issue?

DOCTOR SWALES

Then I wouldn't be who I am.

GWENDOLYN

You'd be better -- and so will she. Look, I was only twenty-three when the joints of my fingers became so inflamed, I was forced to give up my violin, my career. But now the gene's been identified, so our daughter will be spared. Don't look so sad; I was lucky. I applied to Columbia, and discovered my aptitude for science.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, I hope you have an aptitude for motherhood as well. In the meantime, you're going to need a doula.

MARLIN

A doula...?

DOCTOR SWALES

A woman who cares for pregnant women.

MARLIN

They're like midwives, aren't they?

DOCTOR SWALES

They're related, but doulas are specifically trained to help pre and post natal mothers. The native women help each other, but I know several who serve Americans and Europeans.

GWENDOLYN

We really don't want a stranger around.

DOCTOR SWALES

If you want me as your doctor, you have no choice. I know you can afford it, and you'll thank me in the end.

GWENDOLYN

What if I scare her away? You saw Orma's reaction: she's probably telling everyone she knows.

DOCTOR SWALES

Then best provide an explanation: Let's say an infectious dermatitis arose from contact with minerals in your lab. That's plausible, and frankly, Gwen, you look rather striking. (*handing Marlin a card*) Here's the number of a highly reputable doula named...

DOCTOR SWALES
...Mirabelle Fontaine.

MIRABELLE'S VOICE
Mirabelle Fontaine!

DOCTOR SWALES

Her motto is,...

DOCTOR SWALES
... "I mother the mothers."

MIRABELLE'S VOICE
"I mother the mothers!"

(Now MIRABELLE appears at her lectern.)

MIRABELLE

Those were my first words to Mister Welles and the first words of the first chapter of My History of Dolphina. That was twenty years ago, when the weather patterns started shifting, though we were not yet alarmed.

(As MIRABELLE continues speaking, SHE removes her bandana, becoming her younger self, seated in an office. MARLIN enters and sits across from her.)

MIRABELLE

I was explaining to Mister Welles that I provide services before, during, and after pregnancy, so the birth of your child is a positive experience for everyone: the baby, the mother, and father -- which is you, yes?

MARLIN

We expect you to be discreet, so you'll have to sign a confidentiality agreement. Frankly, it was Doctor Swales who insisted we hire a doula.

MIRABELLE

I see. Now tell me, when is your wife due to deliver?

MARLIN

In three months, around May fifteenth, but she has...complications. Doctor Swales thinks you should live with us, unless you'd rather commute. We assume you'll be reliable, though I confess my impression of the natives is that they're chronically late and rarely finish what they start.

MIRABELLE

I do not suffer from punctuality disorders.

MARLIN

If you live with us, you'll have your own room, bath, and laundering facilities. I've noticed some of these village homes still don't have running water.

MIRABELLE

Believe me, Mister Welles, the doulas of Dolphina are trained to be better than clean and better than reliable. They are kind, especially towards the women who need them. Now I can vouch for myself, and produce a file full of references. I will need the same from you.

MARLIN

From me...?

MIRABELLE

Of course. I cannot venture into homes unless the families are respectable. I'll require two character references, and a statement from your bank.

MARLIN

I can certainly pay. As for references, they're focused on my academic credentials.

MIRABELLE

That will suffice. Now please fill out this form with your address, e-mail, phone number, etceteras. I believe you're part of the American colony on the south side.

MARLIN

That's right, but we tend to keep to ourselves.

MIRABELLE

Very hush hush. Everyone is waiting for six headed monkeys to come leaping from the trees.

MARLIN

Then I'm afraid they'll be disappointed.

MIRABELLE

They say you're brewing pots full of genes. Is it true they've found genes for the color of skin?

MARLIN

Well, yes, certain genome sequences have revealed the polymorphisms responsible for pigment variations.

MIRABELLE

My neighbors say you're plotting to destroy our race.

MARLIN

That's ridiculous.

MIRABELLE

Will we say au revoir to full blooded Africans?

MARLIN

No!

MIRABELLE

And mixed breeds as well?

MARLIN

Of course not! You can tell these rumor mongers that we're pursuing legitimate research on the noncoding molecules between genes of lionfish, toadfish, and hundreds of others. In simpler terms -- we're looking for the genetic switches that make certain fish the kinds of fish they are.

MIRABELLE

Fascinating! I love fish myself -- served on a platter au jus, ha, ha! And now, Mister Welles, I shall recite my qualifications: I'm native born, of French, Spanish, and African ancestry. I'm a certified practical nurse and have assisted in eighty-four births, nine of them breech and two perilous, but everyone is thriving. I'm also a massage therapist, familiar with tropical diseases, beneficial vitamins, and the procuring of natural curatives. I confess we doulas can become overly attached to our mothers and their babies, and I sometimes suffer from this weakness. Now, if I approve your references and you wish to employ me, then I believe your wife will be served best if I reside in the house.

MARLIN

By next week, you can expect a call from our housekeeper,...

MARLIN

...Orma Setimba.

ORMA

Orma Setimba!

(MARLIN departs while ORMA has breezed in to greet MIRABELLE who now stands at the threshold of the Welles' parlor, carrying a suitcase.)

ORMA

Thank god you're here! When Mister Welles said he was hiring a lady for Madam, it was happy times for Orma, happy times! You're famous, you know, famous for helping the hard cases.

MIRABELLE

Am I now?

ORMA

They say, "Nothing rattles her cage, nothing!" But wait till you meet Madam! She's supposed to be in the family way, but she's got a flat belly, flat breasts, and her breath -- like codfish three days old and not in the fridge! Her favorite is raw mullet, even the eyes! The damn thing's flip flopping in the bucket, then she grabs, takes a bite, and down it goes -- glub, glub!

MIRABELLE

But surely the doctor forbids this.

ORMA

Ha! Who listens to doctors?! An hour after he left, we caught her eating snails -- raw! Nothing makes her heave, man, nothing. Those devils got her good, but Mister Welles tossed all the fish in the trash, not a fishbone left in the whole damn house! They both give me the heebies, but she's the worst, and now he won't touch her. Before the glitters came, he would smile and mind his manners, but now he's got a nasty tongue on him, always cross -- "Orma, do this, Orma, do that"-- it's appalling, really appalling.

MIRABELLE

Do you live in the house?

ORMA

No waaaay! I've got myself a boyfriend, a cheeky Rastafarians from Montego Bay.

(MARLIN enters.)

ORMA

Here she is, Mister Welles: Miss Mirabelle Fontaine! I'll carry her baggage to her room.

(ORMA departs.)

MIRABELLE

What a grand house you have here, Mister Welles, plenty of room for the baby.

MARLIN

Yes.

MIRABELLE

Since we met, I've been reading all about genes.

MARLIN

Really?

MIRABELLE

Oh, yes, those clever nucleotides that gave me my father's amber eyes, his nappy hair, and look at his big flat feet, ha, ha! But I'm most fortunate: my mother is melancholic and my father full of fun and beans, so to have his bean genes is a blessing to the bone.

MARLIN

Good, because you'll need a sense of humor around here. Now it's time you met Gwendolyn. I should warn you, in case you haven't heard -- she shines.

(Lights reveal GWENDOLYN in her room, plucking sardines from a small pail, devouring them ravenously as MARLIN and MIRABELLE approach.)

MARLIN

(knocking gently) Gwen...? Mirabelle's here, may we come in?

(As MARLIN and MIRABELLE enter, a fish tail is seen slipping through Gwendolyn's lips.)

MARLIN

What the hell?! How could you?!

GWENDOLYN

I...I'm sorry. It's just that when she's active, my cravings are so intense, I can't stop, and *she's* the one who wants it, not me! I've always preferred poultry. *(starting to cry)* Oh, shhhit...

MARLIN

Well, Mirabelle, here's the expectant mother -- provided she doesn't kill the baby first!

(MARLIN snatches the pail of fish, and marches off.)

GWENDOLYN

I...I'm sorry you had to witness our quarreling. I hope my appearance doesn't upset you.

MIRABELLE

No, ma'am, it's not every day you meet the angel on the Christmas tree.

GWENDOLYN

I'm no angel. *(pause)* I guess we'll be getting to know each other in the next few months, so please call me Gwen. I'm afraid I'll be dull company since I spend most of my time with computers.

MIRABELLE

Ah, what are your daily habits then?

GWENDOLYN

I'm awake by six, walk to the beach for a swim, eat breakfast, then work in the lab. Lunch is at one, then I'm back at the lab from two till five, then I swim again, and dinner's at seven. I notice you're still staring, but you'll get used to it.

MIRABELLE

To the shine, yes, but the stink...

GWENDOLYN

Is it really that bad?

MIRABELLE

I'll step back a few paces. *(retreating)* Ah, there.

GWENDOLYN

I wonder, did Marlin tell you about the baby...?

MIRABELLE

A girl, yes...?

GWENDOLYN

You've heard of clones?

MIRABELLE

You're giving birth to yourself?

GWENDOLYN

Not exactly, but she'll have my features and intelligence. We're calling her Finoola.

MIRABELLE

Is Finoola causing your glimmer?

GWENDOLYN

Maybe. It's even on the soles of my feet, and look at my nails.

MIRABELLE

Ah, silver plated, very decorative. When I was a girl, my mother's prize possession was a fine sterling platter. It was very beautiful -- just like you. Now would you mind if I listened to Finoola's heart? (*positioning her stethoscope*) Ha! You've got a cancan dancer in there! So how long have you had this fish fetish?

GWENDOLYN

Two weeks, and it's getting worse, but it's the only way to stop her kicking -- that and swimming. Lately, I like to stay wet or at least damp, and preferably submerged. If I'm not at work, I'm in the ocean or the tub, taking long baths, and whenever it rains, I stand outside.

MIRABELLE

You don't get the shivers?

GWENDOLYN

No, I turn up my face, and drink in the drops with my mouth, my eyes, every pore on my body. I used to hate storms, but I love Dolphina's, especially those hard, pounding, pulsating kind that come streaming from the clouds to rattle the roof and drench every hair, every fiber. Our bodies are seventy percent water, but mine wants to be eighty, ninety, a hundred percent!

(GWENDOLYN gasps, clutching her stomach, then finds another small pail and devours a sardine.)

GWENDOLYN

She's always hungry but there's only one left. (*pause, swallowing the fish*) Please don't think I'm deliberately harming her. I...I keep trying to concentrate on my work, but she's all I ever think about.

MIRABELLE

Tell me, has Doctor Swales prescribed an antibiotic?

(As GWENDOLYN responds, DOCTOR SWALES sweeps in with his ultrasound machine, followed by MARLIN and ORMA.)

GWENDOLYN

Yes. He's coming tomorrow; he's going to give me an...

GWENDOLYN
...unltrasound.

DOCTOR SWALES
Ultrasound...

DOCTOR SWALES
...allows us to observe the prenatal Finula! Are you all right, Marlin?

MARLIN
No, I'm in a cold sweat.

ORMA
Oh, man, my heart's a hammer -- bang, bang, bang!

DOCTOR SWALES
Gwendolyn? Are you ready?

(GWENDOLYN nods as DOCTOR SWALES applies the scanner to her abdomen and THEY stare at the screen. In another area, dim flickering lights reveal what they see: the transparent amniotic sac with the shimmering fetal FINOOLA swaying inside.)

MARLIN
(*sighing, relieved*) So there she is.

MIRABELLE
Ahhh!

ORMA
No horns, no tail -- thank god!

MIRABELLE
Greetings, little Finoola. (*pause*) Doctor, look closely -- her hands.

MARLIN
What...? What is it?

DOCTOR SWALES
Membranes between the fingers...and toes.

MARLIN
Jesus...

ORMA
My god,...

ORMA
...she's got duck feet, man.

MIRABELLE

Look at her neck, beneath the ears: small narrow slits.

DOCTOR SWALES

Good lord...

MARLIN

What...?

DOCTOR SWALES

She appears to have gills.

ORMA

From all that stinky fish! You've got yourself a fish baby, a poor fish baby for that old soul to live in.

MARLIN

Orma, will you please shut up! *(to Doctor Swales)* Can these membranes be removed?

DOCTOR SWALES

I expect it's possible.

GWENDOLYN

But what if...?

MARLIN

What!?

GWENDOLYN

If she's a swimmer, they'll be useful, and she really won't be so different.

MARLIN

How can you say that?! Who do you know with gills and webbed feet?!

GWENDOLYN

(to Doctor Swales) It's not so terrible, is it?

DOCTOR SWALES

(pause, he sighs) Sorry, Gwen, but your test results aren't reassuring. Your dermal layers are infused with mineral residue, ichthylepidin, and magnesium carbonate. Your blood contains toxic amounts of methyl-mercury and traces of tetrodotoxin. You're also full of worms, mostly flukes and nematodes. Frankly, it's incredible you're still functioning. At the very least you should be vomiting constantly.

GWENDOLYN

Well, I'm not.

DOCTOR SWALES

I assume you've stopped eating fish.

ORMA

No!

MARLIN

No,...

MARLIN

...she has not! This morning I noticed several specimens missing from our tanks.

ORMA

My god...

DOCTOR SWALES

Did you eat them?!

MARLIN

Of course she ate them! You see what we're dealing with here?!

GWENDOLYN

Do you think I want to be like this?! I told you, it's Finoola!

DOCTOR SWALES

Why on earth would Finoola ingest poison?

GWENDOLYN

Why do you think?! The world's toxic, isn't it? So she's...preparing herself.

MARLIN

That's insane!

DOCTOR SWALES

Have you given any thought to...terminating?

ORMA

No!

MARLIN

Yes!

GWENDOLYN

Yes,...

GWENDOLYN

...of course. I've thought of nothing else, of every possible outcome, but the answer is no, and no more ultrasounds. After nine failed attempts, I'm seeing this through.

ORMA

And let's not forget Madam's age. She's no spring chicken, no sir; the clock is ticking -- tick tock, tick tock.

MARLIN

That's enough, Orma!

GWENDOLYN

She's right, I'm thirty-seven. This may be my last chance.

ORMA

It's too late to terminate, much too late.

DOCTOR SWALES

Not in an emergency.

ORMA

I told you, man, she's already got a soul.

MARLIN

Oh, for chrissake!

ORMA

It's an old soul she has, and if you kill her, a black curse will fall on your head and on Madam's head too.

MARLIN

Orma, would you please leave and fix lunch -- if anyone still has an appetite.

ORMA

Now?

MARLIN

Yes, now!

(ORMA departs.)

DOCTOR SWALES

You realize -- assuming she survives -- your baby will be malformed.

GWENDOLYN

She'll be able to live in water as well as on land.

DOCTOR SWALES

You think that's an advantage, but you have a grave responsibility when you create someone so...unique.

MARLIN

Listen to Hurleigh. You know what it's like; you were ostracized as a child. Most people can't deal with someone different, even when that difference is a gift.

GWENDOLYN

But what if it's the gift of oceans, of rivers and lakes? If my instincts are right, she'll know the sea in a way we'll never know it.

DOCTOR SWALES

You mean she'll be free of cumbersome scuba gear?

GWENDOLYN

Not just free: fearless! When I was nine, I almost drowned in a lake, and until I was twenty, I wouldn't wade past my knees, so I know what it's like to fear water. *(to Marlin)* Just think: in a few years we'll be home coping with more storms than ever: Boston's harbor will rise to the roof tops; the streets of San Francisco will be buckled by waves; the whole state of Florida will be swallowed by swamps...

MARLIN

Yes, yes, we get the drift!

GWENDOLYN

But Finula will thrive! She'll thrive because she'll have two worlds to live in. Why are you so afraid?

MARLIN

Moving a few genes around isn't the same as creating new life forms!

GWENDOLYN

But what if the life form's creating itself?

MARLIN

That's absurd! But even if it weren't, everyone will say it's reckless and reprehensible, and frankly, if she smells like you, no one will want to go near her!

GWENDOLYN

Oh, Marlin, use your imagination. Finoola could expand our definition of humanity. We might see ourselves as an evolving species instead of separate, selfish, warring nations. Because of Finoola, people will glimpse their future!

MARLIN

Or their past! If she's amphibious, she's regressive.

GWENDOLYN

What if she's both? *(to Doctor Swales)* We were fish once: the bones of our skulls, jaws, and ears began in the gill structures of ancient fish, so Finoola contains our entire genetic history. She'll make the whole of humanity swim faster!

MIRABELLE

But who will follow in her wake? She will be lonesome.

GWENDOLYN

She'll have me.

MIRABELLE

Then I will be her friend as well, though the sea is not my element.

GWENDOLYN

But don't you wish it were?

MIRABELLE

I'm a grassy fields sort of woman; I sink in water.

GWENDOLYN

Look at her: she's waving.

MIRABELLE

Hello, little Finoola! I wonder if she senses our presence?

GWENDOLYN

I wonder if she knows her father wants her dead.

MARLIN

You're wrong. I just don't want to regret she was born.

DOCTOR SWALES

I'm sorry, Gwen, but I strongly recommend an immediate abortion.

GWENDOLYN

Her doctor wants her dead too.

DOCTOR SWALES

I don't subscribe to your quixotic vision. What I see is a fetus that's deformed, under-nourished, and likely to be retarded, which means she'll need constant lifelong care. You're a scientist, so why ignore conspicuous evidence?

GWENDOLYN

Because it's not about evidence; it's about instinct -- *her* instinct! She obviously wants to live.

DOCTOR SWALES

I think you're misinterpreting your own projected feelings, your longing for motherhood.

GWENDOLYN

That's not true -- ask Marlin. I didn't want children because they'd distract me from my work. In fact, we were going to hire a surrogate, but decided if I carried the fetus, we'd avoid any legal ramifications.

DOCTOR SWALES

Of course, you have a right to keep your child, but you also have an obligation to keep her healthy. *(handing over prescription bottles)* Mirabelle, I'd like you to take charge of dispensing these vitamins. This is a more potent antibiotic, and this is a chelation serum to help decrease the mineral toxins. *(to Gwendolyn)* Let's talk again tomorrow.

GWENDOLYN

Why? I'll feel the same, and I don't give a damn what you or anyone thinks.

DOCTOR SWALES

Fine, but there are times when a baby emerges and the mother doesn't feel...motherly. Think about it: this baby might not be very...lovable.

MIRABELLE

I never met a baby who was not, *(glancing at the screen)* Ah, she seems to be turning, but there's something projecting from her back.

DOCTOR SWALES

Yes...

MARLIN

I see it.

MARLIN

What is it? A tumor...? A cyst...?

GWENDOLYN

A fin!

MARLIN

Jesus...

DOCTOR SWALES

I think we've seen enough.

(DOCTOR SWALES removes the scanner from Gwendolyn's abdomen, then turns off the ultrasound machine as the fetal FINOOLA vanishes.)

DOCTOR SWALES

Now I'd like to speak with Miss Fontaine alone for a moment, if I may?

(DOCTOR SWALES takes MIRABELLE aside.)

DOCTOR SWALES

Here's my number. Feel free to call if you need me. You have my sympathy -- perverse appetites can be insatiable.

MIRABELLE

I will be vigilant.

DOCTOR SWALES

She's obviously deranged, and her breath isn't just foul, it's infectious. These imperious Americans! They claim they're well intentioned, but they're not just playing god. I checked the latest research, and there's only five human clones who survived to birth. They're all Chinese. One died of pneumonia, another fell from his pram, and the rest have respiratory problems. The trouble with cloned embryos is they're not genetically equivalent to normal ones, so be prepared -- anything can happen.

(MARLIN approaches DOCTOR SWALES.)

MARLIN

Excuse me, Hurleigh, I wonder if we could meet -- not here, but later next week.

DOCTOR SWALES

Of course, drop by on Sunday for tea. (*nodding*) Good bye, Mirabelle.

(As DOCTOR SWALES departs, MIRABELLE steps forward, donning her bandana, aging twenty years as SHE speaks.)

MIRABELLE

When I began writing My History of Dolphina, I asked Doctor Swales to tell me what transpired the day of his tea party. He explained how Mister Welles said he needed...

MIRABELLE
...help.

MARLIN
Help...

MARLIN
...me, Hurleigh, I need a personal favor. Can you give me a pill or something?

(As MARIN sits on a porch, DOCTOR SWALES enters with two glasses of iced tea and MIRABELLE leaves.)

DOCTOR SWALES

Why? Are you depressed?

MARLIN

Well, yes.

DOCTOR SWALES

Perfectly understandable; I'm happy to oblige.

MARLIN

Look, it's not for me. I want something to...induce a miscarriage.

DOCTOR SWALES

Too late for that. *(pause)* Since the child's a clone, you're not the biological father. I mean, technically speaking, Gwen's father's the father, and even if you were, it's unethical and would violate the mother's rights -- so no.

MARLIN

I'm willing to pay.

DOCTOR SWALES

You're shameless!

MARLIN

My patents provide a substantial income. You could afford to live someplace decent.

DOCTOR SWALES

You don't like my shanty by the sea?

MARLIN

It needs paint, a new roof, and the lawn's a disgrace.

DOCTOR SWALES

Ha, ha! *(pause)* All I can promise is my willingness to perform a late term abortion. Truth be told, Gwen's clone has survived the most toxic intrauterine environment I've ever encountered. Even if she lasts to term, the birth will likely prove too traumatic to ensure survival. Of course, there's no guarantees. Sorry, old boy, things aren't turning out so well, are they?

MARLIN

It's hell. Yesterday I tried to kiss her, but she tastes like anchovies.

DOCTOR SWALES

Toxicity affects everything.

MARLIN

She's still lucid, but childlike and spontaneous, suddenly singing or deciding mid-sentence to run to the beach. What a scene that is! The birds are attracted to her scent and start flapping around; sometimes gulls land on her head, and dozens trail behind. We've tried to keep her isolated, but people are starting to notice, and then there's Mirabelle -- glued to her side like a barnacle.

DOCTOR SWALES.

Now there's a woman without price. Aren't you glad she's there?

MARLIN

I'm not glad about anything. All I want is for Gwen to be herself again. We were making real breakthroughs with our blue-headed wrasses and fairy basslets and now... *(he sighs)*

DOCTOR SWALES

What are "fairy basslets?"

MARLIN

Reef fish of the genus *Anthias*. They're unique because they're transgender -- they change from female to male -- so do the wrasses.

DOCTOR SWALES

How randy of them.

MARLIN

Ha! You'd be amazed at the sex lives of fish! You should see my hermaphrodite sponges.

DOCTOR SWALES

Kinky are they?

MARLIN

They're what we call broadcast spawners. They cloud up the whole aquarium with their sperm, and just last week I witnessed a blue crab copulating for fifty hours straight. But the worst are the dolphins: I've seen four bottle nose males gang up on a single female and go at her for weeks at a time -- it's brutal, but the poor bastards are doomed. They're being caught faster than they can reproduce.

DOCTOR SWALES

(pause) You know, Marlin, maybe you should take some time off. If you're so bloody rich, why don't you fly to the Bahamas for a week? Leave Gwen with Mirabelle and Orma.

MARLIN

I've been tempted, but I can't. The truth is I'm responsible. I'm the one who proposed the...experiment. You heard Gwen -- she didn't want a child.

DOCTOR SWALES

Oh, how the worm turns.

MARLIN

You're gloating, you bastard.

DOCTOR SWALES

Not at all. To me, the whole concept of cloning is repellent. Cloning's for people who want control, but I've always sided with uncertainty. It's the thing I love most about life: the randomness.

MARLIN

Well, I hate it. I especially hate thinking how everyone's watching with morbid fascination. How can they? How can this possibly end well?

DOCTOR SWALES

It can't. It's called eugenics -- the Nazis tried it, remember?

MARLIN

This isn't the same; it's nothing like that!

DOCTOR SWALES

Isn't it though? "Superior children" -- I believe those were Gwen's exact words. A pity the clone is hers instead of yours, then maybe she wouldn't feel so attached.

MARLIN

Gwen was the logical choice. She comes from a long line of octogenarians while my parents died young; plus her I. Q's eight points higher; she's a musician, athletic, and she's beautiful. *(pause, he sighs)* The truth is I miss her -- in bed, in the lab, cooking dinner, puttering in the garden. Believe it or not, we were very compatible -- before I ruined everything by thinking we'd be even happier with a child.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, you might still be. You can always try again -- the old fashioned way.

MARLIN

No thanks. To be honest, I didn't think I'd find pregnancy so...unattractive.

DOCTOR SWALES

You're not alone: one in four men who murder their wives do it when they're pregnant -- makes me wonder if there's some sort of aggressive male response to maternity. Do you think there's genes for everything? I mean, are there genes for faith, hope, and charity?

MARLIN

Maybe, though I'm missing all three, especially faith. By now religion should be as extinct as the giant sea cow.

DOCTOR SWALES

Rubbish! Religion's our antidote -- to the grim fact that we're doomed to grow decrepit and die. I've even grown sympathetic to Obeah. At least it works; the rest is poetry.

MARLIN

What do you mean "it works"?

DOCTOR SWALES

I've witnessed three fatal curses, a dozen miraculous cures, and I'm starting to believe in Hurican. He's the Caribbean god of evil, and the origin of the word "hurricane." He's the local favorite, and the cause of these incessant storms.

MARLIN

You're not serious?

DOCTOR SWALES

No, but I once saw an Obeah witch doctor perform an amazing levitation.

MARLIN

Were you sober?

DOCTOR SWALES

No, ha, ha!

MARLIN

Everyone here drinks too much. I think they feel trapped, and I'm starting to feel the same. Now that we can't leave, I wish we'd never come.

DOCTOR SWALES

Nonsense! Dolphina's flawed, but it's the best place on Earth -- or was before this spate of bad weather, and there's rumors about factions who wanting to take over.

MARLIN

What factions?

DOCTOR SWALES

Oh, the usual paranoia about expat Jamaicans being armed to the teeth. *(pause, he sighs)* I really hate how the world's become so militarized. In my darker moments, I understand wanting to modifying the species. But then there's the happy accident of women like Mirabelle. Do you think she'll go out with me?

MARLIN

Not if she has any taste.

DOCTOR SWALES

Ha, ha! She's not seeing anyone is she?

MARLIN

Not that I know of.

DOCTOR SWALES

Good! You see, my dear Marlin, there's no escaping the romance of life, especially in a tall glass of tea. *(lifting his glass)* Cheers! Ha, ha!

(DOCTOR SWALES' laughter fades as ORMA'S humming swells in volume while lighting candles, and MIRABELLE enters as her older self.)

MIRABELLE

One of the many blessings of Orma was her ceaseless attempts to save us from the fishy odors that enveloped us daily. Two months after the tea party, on a warm dry night, the whole house smelled of...

MIRABELLE

...jasmine.

ORMA

Jasmine...

ORMA

...candles to cover the stink! Someone's put a blood spell on Madam and her child. This doll was in the bushes, under her window.

(ORMA takes a hand sewn doll from her pocket as MIRABELLE becomes her younger self.)

MIRABELLE

What a ratty old thing! Have you seen Miss Gwen? She's not in her room.

(MARLIN enters.)

MARLIN

What's going on here?

MIRABELLE

I fell asleep, and Miss Gwen left her room. She's may have gone to the beach.

ORMA

Ha! She's gone fishing!

MARLIN

Let's take a look.

(MARLIN picks up binoculars. As he raises them to his eyes, lights focus on the hugely pregnant GWENDOLYN on the beach, holding clam shells.)

MARLIN

She's there all right -- digging clams!

ORMA

(dashing off) I'll go fetch her!

MIRABELLE

I'm sorry, Mister Welles, but sometimes while I sleep, she creeps away.

MARLIN

Don't apologize. You can't be expected to track her every move. *(offering the binoculars)* Here, look for yourself. God knows how many times she's escaped. Look, Mirabelle, we all know if this baby lives, she'll be...deficient. You once mentioned your knowledge of natural medicines, so maybe you could... look, if something were to happen...

MIRABELLE

Listen to me, Mister Welles: Finoola does not wish to be a ghost before tasting life.

MARLIN

Now you're sounding like Orma.

MIRABELLE

We are both blessed: she has the gift of a third eye, but I have a third ear. Orma sees Finoola's soul, but I hear her voice.

MARLIN

So what's she got to say for herself?

MIRABELLE

She speaks a watery tongue I cannot comprehend.

MARLIN

How convenient.

MIRABELLE

There's no need to use that tone with me, Mister Welles.

MARLIN

Fine. Then, assuming the veracity of your outrageous beliefs, why doesn't her soul leave for a better body?

MIRABELLE

Every day I ask myself this question. Orma thinks she's cursed, but Miss Gwendolyn believes she'll be welcomed -- since so many millions of creatures have been lost.

MARLIN

So which will she replace? The passenger pigeon? The Tasmanian tiger -- where are you going?!

MIRABELLE

To snatch those damn clams!

(MIRABELLE departs as MARLIN focuses his binoculars on ORMA speaking to GWENDOLYN, sniffing a clam.)

ORMA

This clam spoiled, way past the due date, way past.

GWENDOLYN

No, no, it's perfectly fresh.

ORMA

It's rotten!

GWENDOLYN

It's not; it's fine! Now, give it back!

ORMA

My god, Madam! You are one sick junkie, a junkfish junkie!

(MIRABELLE enters and snatches the clam.)

MIRABELLE

I'll take that!

GWENDOLYN

Give it back!

MIRABELLE

No!

GWENDOLYN

Ohhhh, if only you understood; if only you had cravings of your own!

MIRABELLE

You think I don't have cravings? Ha! If only you knew.

GWENDOLYN

Really...? What...? Tell me!

MIRABELLE

(pause) These weeks of watching you fanning your way through the waves have given me courage. More than anything in this world, I want to swim in the salty sea, but first I must learn how.

GWENDOLYN

So you can track me in the water!

MIRABELLE

Yes, that too.

ORMA

Why don't you teach her, Miss Gwen?

GWENDOLYN

(pause) All right, I will. Then after Finoola's born, we'll swim beside her. Look, the moon's so bright, we can start your lessons now.

MIRABELLE

Now?! But I have no bathing suit.

GWENDOLYN

Just take off your dress.

MIRABELLE

Not in front of Mister Welles! He's spying through the binoculars.

GWENDOLYN

Then we'll swim as we are! Follow me!

(GWENDOLYN wades into the shimmering sea,
followed by MIRABELLE and observed by ORMA.)

MIRABELLE

(stepping lightly) My feet are wet. What next?

GWENDOLYN

Lie back and enjoy the sensation of floating; of defeating gravity. Try not to resist its push and pull; think of the sea as a warm welcome home, an embracing memory.

ORMA

Think of the sea as your lover, ha, ha!

GWENDOLYN

Yes! Fall into his arms; let him sweep you away in his flux and flow.

MIRABELLE

(arching her back) Oh, to think we were born of the sea! To think that wave follows wave every time, that each one takes its own frothy form; to think their glassy peaks can never cease their swelling, can never be captured or cloned!

(MIRABELLE and GWENDOLYN lift their arms in
synchronized backstroking motions as ORMA sings.)

ORMA

*Salty creatures of the sea,
Won't you sail away with me?
Set yours backs beneath my boat,
Wave your tails and off we'll float.
Away, away, so far from home,
Salty creatures not alone.*

(MIRABELLE ceases swimming and stands on the beach, speaking to her audience. GWENDOLYN sits nearby while ORMA returns to the house where DOCTOR SWALES is peering through the binoculars.)

MIRABELLE

The weeks flew by, then Orma told me how Doctor Swales came to visit, to spy on us swimming, looking...

MIRABELLE

...luminous!

DOCTOR SWALES

Luminous...

DOCTOR SWALES

...like sea maidens frolicking in foam, then sunning themselves on the shore.

ORMA

Every day they paddle past that jetty, side by side. Already Miss Mirabelle has mastered the forward, back, and breast strokes. Soon they'll be tracking sand through the whole damn house, grinding it into the carpets, between the floorboards. It's everywhere, man -- in the bed sheets, the cupboards, between my toes! It's appalling, really appalling!

(GWENDOLYN and MIRABELLE chat while DOCTOR SWALES continues to observe them.)

GWENDOLYN

I'm not feeling well. I don't know if it's from Finoola or...

MIRABELLE

The sushi...?

GWENDOLYN

Before I was pregnant, I handled hundreds of fish and their cells in petri dishes, so I've been absorbing toxins through my skin for years. Last year I noticed the first neurological symptoms when I had problems concentrating, and lately I forget why I'm looking into a microscope or downloading a study on salamanders. Sometimes I'm afraid that years of research might slip away, which is why I need to tell you a secret, a very special secret before it's lost. Since you're learning to love the sea as much as I do, I know you'll understand, but you have to promise not to tell a single living soul.

MIRABELLE

I promise.

(Now the focus shifts back and forth from the beach to the parlor.)

GWENDOLYN

First you should know the rumors are true.

DOCTOR SWALES

Orma, are the rumors true?

ORMA

What rumors?!

MIRABELLE

What rumors?

DOCTOR SWALES

Your private peepshow.

ORMA

Why not? You ever hear such a thing? To have a baby born by a silver fish lady on an island like Dolphina -- this is big news on Dolphina!

GWENDOLYN

You pay a price when you dare to change the world.

ORMA

For five dollars, I let the Rasta brothers watch Madam swim. For ten they get a closer look -- asleep in the hammock.

MIRABELLE

Miss Gwen, what are you saying?

GWENDOLYN

The day I transferred my DNA into my ovum, I was working with synthesized genes from salt water species, and I...

MIRABELLE

Tossed them into the soup...?!

ORMA

When she swings with her big silver belly in that old hempy hammock -- what a sight, man, what a sight!

DOCTOR SWALES

What cheek, Orma,...

DOCTOR SWALES
...what gall!

MIRABELLE
(staring in disbelief) What gall.

MIRABELLE
Which fish?

GWENDOLYN
The blue damsel. She'll have my twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, but three piscine pairs as well.

MIRABELLE
Oh, Miss Gwen...

GWENDOLYN
It's because the Chinese and Indians aborted female fetuses. You see, now there's too many males which means unstable governments with unstable armies killing other armies with bombs, and bombs mean pollution, and pollution means rising temperatures which means rising tides, so you see, our blue planet's going to get even bluer, and our children and our children's children will have to adapt, and Finoola will show them how!

MIRABELLE
Does Mister Welles know you did this?

GWENDOLYN
No one knows, but don't you see? It's only natural to want to improve ourselves; it's part of human nature, and nothing can stop us, nothing! Gene therapy's the future! We now know us that inside every organ, every cell of our bodies lies three billion years of history. Even the bones of your hands can be traced to the skeletons of fish, and now we're the designers, moving beyond cloning to creating embryos of every species in every combination -- even resurrecting extinct ones!

MIRABELLE
Oh, Miss Gwen...

GWENDOLYN
No one can suppress the human quest for knowledge -- not credulous clerics, not ignorant politicians! Now Finoola, our own Finoola, will be the source, the wellspring, the Fount of the Great Genomic Age! Think of Finoola leading us into the sea: the oceans will rise, but Finoola will dive -- to the deepest, darkest depths, fathoms further than anyone's ever dreamed! Oh, Mirabelle, she's destined to be born; she has to survive!

DOCTOR SWALES
(turning to Orma) You think the baby will live?

MIRABELLE
Yes.

ORMA
Yes, ...

ORMA
...definitely, no doubt about it. Old Bones won't snatch Finoola, but she's going to come early.

MIRABELLE
Orma said she'll come early...

MIRABELLE
...three weeks from today.

ORMA
Three weeks from today!

(Blackout; as a howl of pain heard. Three weeks later, GWENDOLYN is lying in bed, surrounded by ORMA, MIRABELLE, DOCTOR SWALES, and MARLIN.)

MIRABELLE
She's asleep thank god. The head's slipped to the pelvis.

DOCTOR SWALES
The baby's premature so there's likely to be complications. *(to Marlin)* I still think we should call an ambulance.

MARLIN
Sorry, but she insists on having the baby here. Mirabelle and Orma have prepared a special tub. They expect her to come out swimming.

ORMA
Definitely swimming, no doubt about it, none at all.

MIRABELLE
I'm sorry, Doctor; Miss Gwen is most assertive.

ORMA
Come, Mister Welles, help me fetch the tub!

(MARLIN and ORMA depart.)

DOCTOR SWALES
Good, now we can chat. I want you to know that whatever happens, you've done a heroic job. You've certainly earned your reputation for being devoted to your charges.

MIRABELLE

Oh, my ladies give me great pleasure, especially their babies. I love babies.

DOCTOR SWALES

And I love mothers. I'm a G. P. here, but was trained as a pediatrician, so I've known hundreds generous, good hearted mothers. Seeing their affection kept me sane -- then I'd leave the clinic, turn on the news, and hear how the men of the world were tearing it apart.

MIRABELLE

Miss Gwen says there's too many men since there's too many sons, but my mothers prefer them.

DOCTOR SWALES

Until they grow up! I've never understood it. I mean, isn't it the daughters who tend to their aging parents?! And isn't it young males who grow aggressive and ravage their countries? So why in god's name does everyone still want sons?!

MIRABELLE

Because sons don't bleed and rise higher than daughters, and the daughters who do rise tend to behave like sons.

DOCTOR SWALES

That's because they don't have courage, the courage to change the cultures they were born to.

MIRABELLE

Miss Gwen has the courage; she's as bold as any man.

DOCTOR SWALES

Maybe, but I think she's off her trolley -- sorry, but I do. *(pause)* I suppose this seems an inappropriate time, but do you suppose we might go out for dinner someday?

MIRABELLE

I've heard you have eyes for the ladies. They say you were cast out of England, leaving three wives and six children.

DOCTOR SWALES

Not true -- only two *ex*-wives and three children, and they're all living happily in London -- so please say "yes".

(As MIRABELLE starts to answer, MARLIN and ORMA return with a tub, waking GWENDOLYN.)

ORMA

(to Marlin) Careful, don't spill the water!

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Mirabelle) Say yes!

GWENDOLYN

(drowsily) Is that you, Mirabelle?

MIRABELLE

(whispering) Yes...

GWENDOLYN

What...?

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Mirabelle) What did you say?

MIRABELLE

(to Doctor Swales) Yes! *(to Gwendolyn)* Yes, I'm here, we're all here.

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Gwendolyn) I suppose you know your baby's the talk of the island -- thanks to Orma.

ORMA

What?! Fine, blame Orma, blame Orma for everything! Did I tell you, Madam, my man composed a reggae song in your honor -- written from the mother's point of view.

GWENDOLYN

How nice of him.

MIRABELLE

Why don't you sing it for us?

ORMA

Okay, but there's only one verse. *(pause, then singing beautifully)*

Somewhere in the water

Is my daughter;

Somewhere in the water

Swimming free.

She's gone to find a home

Among the fishes;

She's gone to find a lover

In the sea.

DOCTOR SWALES

Well done, Orma.

MIRABELLE

I'll want a copy of the lyrics for my book.

ORMA

Miss Mirabelle's writing the history of Dolphina.

DOCTOR SWALES

Really? I'm impressed.

MIRABELLE

It's only from the doula's point of view. Mister Welles is also writing a book.

DOCTOR SWALES

Is he now?

GWENDOLYN

Really...?

MARLIN

Not a book, just a journal -- not meant for publication.

MIRABELLE

(to Doctor Swales) I've heard you paint, Doctor, so you could paint Finoola's portrait.

GWENDOLYN

You see, Finoola already has a purpose: She's our muse, our mermuse, our -- ohhhhhhh....

ORMA

Oh, man, that muse wants to pop!

DOCTOR SWALES

Now push, push, push,...

DOCTOR SWALES and MIRABELLE

...push, push, push.

GWENDOLYN

Ohhhhhhhh... *(howling)* Yyyyiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!!

DOCTOR SWALES

Good, good, here she comes...

ORMA
 She's coming, she's coming...

(THEY all hover around GWENDOLYN as a loud slopping sound is heard and FINOOLA is born.)

DOCTOR SWALES
(trembling) Good lord...

MARLIN
(gasping) Jesus...

ORMA
 My god...

MIRABELLE
 Cut the cord, doctor!

DOCTOR SWALES
(shaking) My...my hands...

MIRABELLE
 I'll do it! *(cutting the cord)* Quick, Orma! Bring the tub! Hurry, hurry!

ORMA
(pushing the tub) The tub, the tub, the tub...

MIRABELLE
 Doctor! Orma! Help me lift her!

ORMA
 Oh man, oh man, oh man...

MIRABELLE
 Careful, careful...

ORMA
 Madam's fainted!

(GWENDOLYN has collapsed. MIRABELLE and DOCTOR SWALES lift FINULA into the tub, though she remains unseen.)

MIRABELLE
 Gently, gently, very good. She seems to be breathing fine.

MARLIN
 She should be euthanized.

MIRABELLE
 Please, Mister Welles...

MARLIN

Inject her! Give her a lethal overdose!

MIRABELLE

Go away!

DOCTOR SWALES

Please, Marlin...

MARLIN

For chrissake, look at her! Put her out of her misery! Do it now before Gwen wakes up!

DOCTOR SWALES

Stop it, Marlin, I...I can't...

MARLIN

(thrusting his hands in the tub) If you can't, I will!

(MIRABELLE pushes MARLIN aside.)

MIRABELLE

No, you won't!! No one will be harming Finoola!

ORMA

Look! Look at her eyes! Her fish eyes are open!

MIRABELLE

Like sapphires.

ORMA

Oh, man, I've got the heebies.

(FINOOLA'S watery voice trills the melody of Orma's song.)

FINULA

(with a watery vibrato) Whaaaa, la, la, la,...

ORMA

My god, her voice.

(FINOOLA'S singing continues as darkness descends to pitch black.)

End of Act I

ACT II

(MIRABELLE is wearing her bandana, addressing the audience of scientists and politicians.)

MIRABELLE

The Islanders claim I'm mistaken, misguided, prone to embellish the facts, so you may not believe that Finoola's first sounds were the first notes of Orma's song, but I tell you, it's the truth! There were four sober witnesses to the birth, all of us responding according to our natures: the men escaped to the parlor, while Orma and I carried the tub to the laboratory and dropped Finoola into a large aquarium.

(MIRABELLE removes her bandana and strolls into the laboratory towards the shimmering lights of a giant aquarium. On the bottom lies the slumbering form of FINOOLA. ORMA enters as MIRABELLE continues.)

MIRABELLE

I spent all night watching Finoola breathing bubbles from the murky bottom. Then the next morning Orma explained about...

MIRABELLE

...the afterbirth.

ORMA.

The afterbirth,...

ORMA

...looks like seaweed. I spread it on a tea tray. When it dries, I'll chop it into pieces to tape over the doors.

MIRABELLE

Slip a sliver into Mister Welles' pocket, the one near his heart.

ORMA

Ha! He hasn't got heart! It's really appalling, his behavior, but look at you -- cool as casaba. You are one brave woman, Miss Mirabelle Fontaine, one brave woman!

MIRABELLE

No braver than you, Miss Orma. *(pause)* It was a shock, I tell you, the worst of my life.

ORMA

Tell me about it! I prayed all night to the sea god, Agwe, then begged that old soul to flee its fish body. Find another body, I said, and be quick about it!

MIRABELLE

Never have I felt such silky skin and those eyes! When they peered into mine, I touched her breast and felt Finoola's little heart keeping rhythm with my own.

ORMA

My knees were so wobbly, I almost keeled over, and did you see the doctor?! My god, I thought he'd heave his supper!

(As MIRABELLE responds, DOCTOR SWALES and an intoxicated MARLIN are seen sitting in the parlor.)

MIRABELLE

Shhhhh, we can listen to him and Mister Welles on the baby monitor. The doctor keeps saying he is...

MIRABELLE

...lost.

DOCTOR SWALES

Lost,...

DOCTOR SWALES

...I'm utterly lost -- no idea what to do.

MARLIN

I say flee the wreckage and never look back!

DOCTOR SWALES

I've seen it before, and it's true: everything's tested when a child's born malformed -- your prejudices and preconceptions, your emotional and physical stamina, your very notion of what constitutes human nature.

MARLIN

Are you judging me? Are you saying I've failed the tests? *(pause)* Well, I have! *(pause, he sighs)* Where is she?

DOCTOR SWALES

In the lab, in that aquarium you were saving for the manta rays.

MARLIN

(pause) So what's the damage?

DOCTOR SWALES

(pulling a notebook from his pocket) If you mean what I think you mean, she's pale blue and has a hairless human head on a gilled neck. *(reading)* Attached to her arms are lateral fins; then paired dorsal fins on the upper body, pelvic fins on the lower; and two legs

DOCTOR SWALES (cont'd)

ending in flippers. There's no organ damage and no sirenomelia which means the legs aren't fused. She has sufficient lungs and is warm blooded like higher marine mammals, which means Gwen was right -- she can thrive in both worlds. *(pause)* So will you keep her in the lab or did you prepare a room?

MARLIN

I thought it would live in the sea.

DOCTOR SWALES

No, you thought "it" wouldn't live at all -- neither did I. In any case, she's not an "it." She's mostly female and can lay eggs.

MARLIN

What do you mean "mostly?"

DOCTOR SWALES

She's also part male -- like those fish you've been studying.

MARLIN

Christ... So what happens now?

DOCTOR SWALES

Well, you should rein in Orma -- unless you want everyone in Dolphina at your doorstep.

MARLIN

Our own little sea monster! Orma can run the freak show while Mirabelle handles the feedings -- which reminds me. What happens when she's hungry? What does she eat? Fish bait?!

DOCTOR SWALES

Minced vegetables, raw shrimp, and sea water. At least that's what Mirabelle prepared. I wonder how Gwen will deal with this?

MARLIN

The fact that she took one look and fainted doesn't bode well, but what did she expect, for chrissake?! Remember when you said it's wrong to determine a child's destiny? Well, you were right, and this is her revenge! She resented being genetically pre-programmed, so to punish us she morphed into a monster. It's the Frankenstein story all over again!

DOCTOR SWALES

You know, you really should stop thinking that way; you're talking absolute rubbish!

MARLIN

Am I? My father was a shrink who used to quote Auden: "*I and the public know / What all good school children learn: / Those to whom evil is done, / Do evil in return.*"
Tell me, Hurleigh, have we done evil?

DOCTOR SWALES

It's not for me to judge.

MARLIN

Oh, stop being so sanctimonious. I saw your face. Christ, you had the shakes so bad, you couldn't cut the cord.

DOCTOR SWALES

True, but later she inspired a sort of...sympathy. I suppose it's because she's so small, and her voice -- that strange trilling she does.

MARLIN

Gwen's musical molecules expressing themselves -- warped and wet, but there they are!

(ORMA enters)

ORMA

Excuse me, Mister Welles. I made papaya chicken casserole. Tonight at supper time, you can heat and serve it with the chardonnay.

MARLIN

You're not leaving...?

ORMA

Time to go home and smoke a cigar, a big fat cannabis cigar.

MARLIN

Nobody leaves this house! Not till we decide how to...to handle this.

ORMA

Okay, but I had plans, so I've got to call my man or he'll kill me. The language he'll use -- I'm ashamed to think it.

MARLIN

You can't tell him anything!

ORMA

Trust me, Mister Welles, Orma can keep a secret, but I've been here all night, so he knows something's fishy -- sorry, man, bad choice of words.

DOCTOR SWALES

Orma, why don't you tell Mister Welles what you told me.

ORMA

Why waste my breath? He never listens. Crazy Orma, he says, so why waste my breath?

DOCTOR SWALES

There are people who believe you and Gwen are practicing black magic. To some of these islanders, your science seems demonic, so they're using their magic to fight yours. Someone's even making Finoola dolls. Why don't you show him, Orma?

ORMA

(retrieving a doll from her pocket) This was left in Madam's bird feeder. Before that, I found four in the bushes exactly the same -- the same ribbons, the same baldy head.

DOCTOR SWALES

Don't you think it's extraordinary how Finoola resembles the doll?

ORMA

The curse got her on the outside, but inside is an old soul, a bold soul with a mission.

DOCTOR SWALES

What mission?

ORMA

I haven't got a clue, man, not a clue,

MARLIN

Of course you don't! *(to Doctor Swales)* How can you be so credulous!?

ORMA

(to Doctor Swales) Forget it -- he's not a believer.

MARLIN

That's right, I'm an atheist! Our souls died with biology, neurology, physics, and genetics.

DOCTOR SWALES

Then why do I feel so certain you're wrong?

MARLIN

Because the genomic software in your cellular consciousness allows for delusions!

DOCTOR SWALES

Did you hear that, Orma? We're deluded.

ORMA

I don't give a shit what he thinks. Orma knows what Orma sees. Before I call home, Miss Mirabelle said to tell you that Madam's awake and staring at the walls. Cold as ice she is, and not a drop of milk in her, not a drop, and she didn't ask to see the fish baby, didn't say a word, not a word.

DOCTOR SWALES

She has a name, Orma. It's "Finoola", not "fish baby".

ORMA

Fin Fin Finoola, la!

(ORMA dances off.)

MARLIN

Gwen will recover; she's the consummate scientist: adaptable and unshockable.

(MARLIN and DOCTOR SWALES remain seated in one area, as GWENDOLYN, in her nightgown, approaches the aquarium in another area. SHE peers through the glass, unaware that MIRABELLE has followed her.)

GWENDOLYN

(staring at Finoola) Oh, noooooo...

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Marlin) If she's so unshockable, why did she faint?

MARLIN

(to Doctor Swales) Profound disappointment.

GWENDOLYN

(to Finoola) Who are you?

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Marlin) Let's hope you're right. For all we know, she may even grow fond of...

DOCTOR SWALES
...Finoola.

GWENDOLYN
Finoola...?

MARLIN
(to Doctor Swales) You and your “mother love theory.”

DOCTOR SWALES
You’re drunk, Marlin.

FINOOLA
(singing notes from Orma’s song) Ahhhhhh, laaaa, llllllllll, leeeeeeee...

MARLIN
Oh, Christ, Hurleigh,...

GWENDOLYN
(to Finoola) Oh, my god...

MARLIN
...what have we done?

GWENDOLYN
...what have we done...?

(MARLIN and DOCTOR SWALES depart as
GWENDOLYN slumps to the floor and MIRABELLE
rushes towards her.)

MIRABELLE
Miss Gwen! Are you all right...? *(calling)* Orma!!

(ORMA scurries in to assist GWENDOLYN.)

ORMA
Here, Madam, take my arm, let me help you up, up up!

GWENDOLYN
(recovering) I...I’m fine, really... *(glancing into the aquarium)* She has a human face, but
I...I don’t see myself.

FINOOLA
Laaa, laaa, looo, llllll..

MIRABELLE
Have you ever heard such sounds?

ORMA

Look how she moves her lips like a fish, just like a fish, and did you hear those fins of hers going swish swish all night long? My god, who can sleep?!

MIRABELLE

Shush! That's enough! Come now, Miss Gwen, you should be in bed.

GWENDOLYN

I'm not tired. *(pause)* wonder if she's aware...?

ORMA

Oh, there's plenty of slosh in that coconut!

GWENDOLYN

Orma, please tell my husband and Doctor Swales to come here.

(ORMA exits as FINULA ceases singing and GWENDOLYN turns to MIRABELLE.)

GWENDOLYN

(pause, she sighs) So much for passing on my violin...

MIRABELLE

Her instrument is her voice.

GWENDOLYN

We won't be sending pictures to the proud grandparents, will we? *(pause)* I thought she'd look more like...us.

MIRABELLE

She seems to have sprouted wings -- water wings!

GWENDOLYN

Since she's asleep, let's cover the tank.

(MIRABELLE covers the tank with a cloth.)

GWENDOLYN

Orma keeps saying she has an old soul. What does she mean?

MIRABELLE

Most spirit bodies are white, but Finoola's is amber and glows past her earth body.

GWENDOLYN

If she's an old soul, is she a wise one?

MIRABELLE

Not always. Sometimes they keep getting born and reborn, over and over till they learn.

GWENDOLYN

Learn what?

MIRABELLE

What got in the way of going to heaven. *(pause)* Come now, Miss Gwen, sit down.

(MIRABELLE leads GWENDOLYN to a chair as
DOCTOR SWALES, MARLIN, and ORMA enter.)

GWENDOLYN

I want to thank you for delivering Finoola. I think you're all...heroic.

MARLIN

So how does it feel to have given birth to the first homo piscine? It looks like you've made genomic history.

GWENDOLYN

Only if she lives, and since no one -- outside ourselves - - knows she was born, I suggest we say nothing. *(to Doctor Swales)* Can we postpone registering her birth? We need time to...adjust.

MARLIN

Gwen's right. Let's keep her under wraps till we know she's going to survive. Then we'll have to determine where she's going to live and how.

DOCTOR SWALES

Sorry, but I don't see how you can keep her "under wraps".

MARLIN

We'll secure the place, install more alarms. Otherwise, we risk a media circus, not to mention ridicule, condemnation, and *(to Orma)* the whole of Dolphina watching her every move.

ORMA

Don't look at me, man.

DOCTOR SWALES

Are you sure exposure's such a bad thing? (*to Gwendolyn*) After all, didn't you say Finoola might inspire new discoveries -- not to mention some affection. So far Mirabelle's the only one who doesn't mind touching her.

GWENDOLYN

The water's cloudy, but she has teeth like fish in the class Osteichthyes, and she seems to be acquiring new fins so she resembles an invertebrate anemone. I'm afraid I still can't tell if she's sentient.

MARLIN

Let's hope not. Otherwise, she'll realize the age of mammals is in full swing, and she's not invited to the party. She'll hate us.

GWENDOLYN

Especially me. She'll be a perpetual reminder of... (*she sighs*)

MARLIN

Of what...? Your hubris or your hunger? (*to Mirabelle, Orma, and Doctor Swales*) If you don't mind, I'd like to speak with my wife alone.

ORMA

Yes, sir, Mister Welles.

(ORMA and DOCTOR SWALES depart as MIRABELLE lingers to the side, speaking as her older self.)

MIRABELLE

I confess I eavesdropped like a common meddler. If you read [My History of Dolphina](#), you'll see this was the moment when Mister Welles said,...

MIRABELLE

...you don't have much appetite.

MARLIN

You don't have much appetite,

MARLIN

...do you?

GWENDOLYN

None. When she left my body, she seems to have taken it with her -- along with my maternal instincts. I can barely stand to look at the little beast, and she's always warbling, like some bottom feeding diva. Oh, Marlin, why do I feel such...

MARLIN

Revulsion...? Because she's a freak, and freaks make us realize how lucky we are to be us and not them.

GWENDOLYN

I suppose I'm suffering from post partum depression.

MARLIN

Aren't we all?

GWENDOLYN

(she sighs) Oh, why can't we be like Mirabelle?

MARLIN

Because for Mirabelle empathy's a job, a vocation. She cultivates it because she has to; it's what she does.

GWENDOLYN

I think it's a gift, but maybe there's a gene.

MARLIN

Then it's regressive, or we're deficient and not fit to be parents -- at least not to her.

GWENDOLYN

(pause, she sighs) Look, whomever we are, I don't think it's right to impose our mistake on the world -- or the world on her. Is there any way we could...?

MARLIN

What..? Make her go away? It's a little late for that, isn't it? *(pause)* Right after she was born, I...I tried to euthanize her, but Mirabelle stopped me. I wish I could say I was grateful.

GWENDOLYN

(pause) Maybe you could carry her out of the lab, and -- well, you could sit her on the beach. She might be drawn to the sea or you give her a...a nudge.

MARLIN

Of course, when she's gone, we'll have to explain,

GWENDOLYN

Just tell the truth: you carried her to the beach and she swam off. You could even say you were drunk.

MARLIN

But what if someone finds her? What if a fisherman catches her in his net?

GWENDOLYN

He'd have a heart attack.

MARLIN

What if he kills her?

GWENDOLYN

Oh, please...

MARLIN

What if he eats her?

GWENDOLYN

Oh, for chrissake!

MARLIN

(pause, he sighs) I'll send Orma and Hurleigh home, then wait till Mirabelle's asleep.

GWENDOLYN

Do it, Marlin; do it tonight!

MARLIN

I'll think about it. Now get some sleep.

GWENDOLYN

I can't; I keep having this dream: It's pitch dark in the lab, and Orma's dipping into the aquarium with a net. She's lifting Finoola out to show me her face, only it's not her face, it's mine -- my cloned, corrupted, fishified face. I'm repulsed, and open my mouth and Finoola leaps inside and I swallow her and start choking and...

MARLIN

Stop, damnit! That's the mercury talking! Now please, Gwen, go to sleep.

GWENDOLYN

I'll try, and Marlin...

MARLIN

What...?

GWENDOLYN

I forget...

(As MARLIN departs, MIRABELLE escorts ORMA and DOCTOR SWALES to the door.)

MARLIN
Good night.

MIRABELLE
Good night,...

MIRABELLE
....Doctor.

DOCTOR SWALES
I wish you'd start calling me Hurleigh. Now please give Gwen another sedative, though you really should get some sleep yourself.

ORMA
And wouldn't you like to join her, ha, ha!

MIRABELLE
Orma, shush!

DOCTOR SWALES
Have I said how grateful I am to you both?

ORMA
No, man, but I don't think Madam will be cloning herself again, now will she?

MIRABELLE
It's strange, I tell you, the more I observe Finoola, the more I feel...affection, but I've always loved babies, the odd ones best of all.

ORMA
Not this odd!

MIRABELLE
Oh, I've seen faces like ancient Chinaman, potbellied dwarves, yellow imps with bowed legs, babes scarred by port stains and moles splattered like paint.

DOCTOR SWALES
So have I, but I confess I'm...discouraged, though nothing seems to repulse you, does it?

MIRABELLE

Oh, I'm repulsed -- by my own dark devils, but we doulas take our mothers and their babies as they come. Despite genetic miracles, babies are random gifts, and we're meant to hold them, not mold them.

ORMA

Ha! She's too damn slippery to hold! Now, please, Doctor, give Miss Mirabelle a peck on the cheek, and take me home!

(DOCTOR SWALES kisses MIRABELLE as darkness descends on the beach at midnight. MARLIN is holding FINOOLA, swaddled in a towel. HE sets her on the sand as the older MIRABELLE speaks.)

MIRABELLE

Later that night, I was sitting by the window watching the cloud curtains part to reveal a full moon. That's when I saw a form in the distance, and I knew Mister Welles was introducing Finoola to...

MIRABELLE

...the Caribbean Sea.

MARLIN

The Caribbean Sea...

MARLIN

...will be your new home. You'll have more room to swim, and the water's warm and full of food to sustain you. *(pause)* I hope you'll forgive your mother and me for bringing you into this mad world. Ours is a weak, barbaric species, trashing the land and turning the seas into acidic sewers, and since we can't seem to modify our behavior, we've modified our offspring instead, which is why -- Jesus! Where are you!? *(searching desperately)* Hey! Finoola?! Finoolaaaaa!! Come back here -- oh, Christ, what am I saying?!

(The young MIRABELLE enters, brandishing a flashlight.)

MIRABELLE

Where's Finoola?!

MARLIN

(startled) What...?!

MIRABELLE

Where is she?!

MARLIN

She...she was right here. She must have slipped out of the towel and into the water and...

MIRABELLE

You threw her into the sea?!

MARLIN

No, no, she went on her own!

MIRABELLE

You brought her here, yes?!

MARLIN

Yes, but...

MIRABELLE

That baby was thrown in the sea!

MARLIN

Not “thrown”!

MIRABELLE

Shame on you, Mister Welles!

MARLIN

Look, I just wanted to see if she’d swim! I was just...

MIRABELLE

Casting her away!! Go home, Mister Welles; I’ll wait till she returns!

MARLIN

But what if she doesn’t? Oh, god, what if...?

MIRABELLE

I tell you, she will!

MARLIN

But what if she’s lost? *(taking off his shirt)* I’m going after her!

MIRABELLE

(holding him back) No, no, it’s too damn dark! You can’t see her, but she can see us. Give me the flashlight! We’ll wait here!

MARLIN

Christ, I...I feel sick...

(Pause as MARLIN sits, resting his head in his hands. MIRABELLE stoops beside him, pointing the flashlight towards the sea.)

MIRABELLE

Listen, Mister Welles, why don't you and Miss Gwen go away, take a cruise to the Caymans, stay a month at least. You can leave Finoola with me and Orma; Doctor Swales will help if we need him.

MARLIN

(pause, he sighs) Yes, it might be good to...to get away.

MIRABELLE

We will continue to guard Finoola's privacy, but I'll need more monitors.

MARLIN

Fine.

MIRABELLE

I also want underwater microphones to amplify her songs.

MARLIN

Whatever you need. *(pause, he sighs)* It's obvious you care more than the rest of us put together. Despite our differences, I admire you as much as anyone I've ever known. I can see why Hurleigh's in love with you. Sometimes I think you've cast a spell on us all.

MIRABELLE

No spells; I'm not a witch doctor.

MARLIN

No, but you do have powers: Gwen respects you; Orma follows you like a puppy; Hurleigh's hopelessly smitten; and I've started to find you...indispensable.

MIRABELLE

Listen, Mister Welles, I've seen dozens of cases, so I know the heartache of caring for an uncommon child. The parents always suffer, the mothers most of all. Ahhhhh! Look! There she is! *(waving the flashlight)* Finnoooolllllaaa! Here! Here we are! Finnoooooola!

MARLIN

Finnooolaaaaa!

MIRABELLE

She sees us! Here she comes!

MARLIN

I'll start making travel arrangements tomorrow. A month should be sufficient, maybe longer, maybe two months.

(Moonlight fades on MIRABELLE and MARLIN as dim lights reveal the laboratory where ORMA and DOCTOR SWALES are standing near the aquarium, observing FINOOLA as the older MIRABELLE speaks.)

MIRABELLE

Two months turned into two years and Finoola grew into a graceful sea nymph,...

MIRABELLE

...an underwater acrobat.

ORMA

An underwater acrobat...

ORMA

...is what she is, and look at those fish lips -- forming the Or of Orma. (*waving*) Hello, Finoola la! Look here, Doctor, I'll hum a calypso tune, and Finoola will copy it exactly. Now listen: *tra, la, la la, la, la, loooo.*

FINULA

(*with amplification*) *Tra, la, la, la, la, la, looooo*

ORMA

There, you see, exactly the same, and today's a big day for Finoola. Today her parents are coming to visit, though Mister Welles said Madam's still got the glooms, and now that her silver's faded, so has her shine -- you know what I mean? Maybe now she feels she was some kind of lowlife fish junkie, which is what I called her myself...

DOCTOR SWALES

Shhhush!

(GWENDOLYN and MARLIN enter, followed by movement in the aquarium.)

FINOOLA

Laaaaa, looooo, ruuuuu....

MARLIN

Hello, Hurleigh! Good to see you.

DOCTOR SWALES

It's been too long; welcome home!

MARLIN

(*pause, gazing at Finoola*) Since you've been observing her, is she more piscine or anthropoid?

DOCTOR SWALES

Anthro, but her eyes are hypersensitive to light, which is why we keep the room so dim. She has a normal cardiovascular system with a heart as efficient as our own.

MIRABELLE

Her hearing, olfactory, and digestive systems are similar as well.

MARLIN

But how long can she stand upright?

GWENDOLYN

The real question is will she acquire consciousness, a perception of herself?

DOCTOR SWALES

Yes, I think so.

ORMA

Definitely!

ORMA

There's plenty of mush in that mango! Look how happy she is to see you!

MIRABELLE

I tell you, she's brighter than any baby I've tended. Look at her fine head housing a brain we can assume is like your own.

DOCTOR SWALES

Touché.

ORMA

Ha, ha!

ORMA

Just don't feed her while leaning over the tank, right, Doctor?

DOCTOR SWALES

Enough, Orma!

ORMA

When he stepped on the stool, Finoola bobbed to the surface. The next thing you know, he's thrashing in the tank, his arms and legs all akimbo, all akimbo! Ha, ha!

DOCTOR SWALES

She pulled me in!

ORMA

She's a clinger, man, a clinger, ha, ha! Those fins stuck like glue, man, they were playing for keeps!

DOCTOR SWALES

Shouldn't you be cooking or something?

ORMA

Shouldn't you be with your patients? *(to Gwendolyn)* He comes here every day, and not to see Finoola la!

MIRABELLE

Shush, Orma!

GWENDOLYN

We were here last night. Marlin lured Finoola to the surface and scraped some skin samples. I've done an initial analysis, and I think we can generate hair follicles and alter her pigmentation. We'll make her darker rather than lighter, so it's easier to camouflage the blue.

ORMA

Ha! Instead of an Anglo-fish baby, you'll have an Afro-fish baby. So will she be butter-scotch, caramel, or chocolate?

GWENDOLYN

Does it matter?

ORMA

Definitely!

DOCTOR SWALES

She's right. Some islanders think darker the skin the lower the rung on the genetic ladder.

ORMA

And my god, half the island thought you were hatching a new race -- white as snow, they said, shining like silver. But Orma told them you were harmless, "Just hatching fish," I said, "just hatching fish."

GWENDOLYN

Yes, well, speaking of fish, I've also analyzed her fin samples, and they won't regenerate, so I'm going to dissect them.

MIRABELLE

Dissect them?! You mean...?

GWENDOLYN

Sever them -- all forty-seven -- tomorrow morning.

MIRABELLE

But she's attached to those fins! She fancies them swirling about while she swims.

GWENDOLYN

She's not going far in that tank.

MIRABELLE

She will when she swims in the sea. Finoola's fins are her water wings, her means of propulsion, and when she sleeps, they fall like a gown of silky fringe.

GWENDOLYN

Gowns are impractical. If we operate, we'll liberate her from a future of isolation.

MIRABELLE

Not yet, not now, wait till she's older, then let it be her choice.

DOCTOR SWALES

Choice? Her choices were stolen before she was born!

GWENDOLYN

Which is why we should rectify things now -- before she's aware of her...condition.

MIRABELLE

Miss Gwen, what's happened ? Why have you changed so much?

GWENDOLYN

Because I'm no longer in the thrall of addiction, though I suspect you prefer me that way. Come on, Marlin, let's go!

(MARLIN and GWENDOLYN start to leave.)

MIRABELLE

Wait! Please, Miss Gwen, we need to discuss Finoola's future.

GWENDOLYN

I'm her mother; I'll decide her future.

MIRABELLE

But I bore witness to her past, so I know what she needs.

DOCTOR SWALES

Ladies, may I suggest...

GWENDOLYN

No, you may not! We're grateful to you, Mirabelle, but please remember that you're employed by me and my husband.

MIRABELLE

I remember. Now *you* remember that I've served you well these years: Let's not forget the months I endured your nasty habits and capricious moods, and since I've been Finoola's caretaker, I believe I've earned the right to speak! I promise to brief.

MARLIN

For godssake, let her speak.

ORMA

Yes, let her speak!

GWENDOLYN

Please leave, Orma; this is none of your business!

ORMA

Fine, fine, Orma is leaving.

(ORMA ambles off.)

GWENDOLYN

Well, go on.

MIRABELLE

I have a proposition. *(pause, taking a breath)* I wish to adopt Finoola, to be her guardian.

GWENDOLYN

What...?

MARLIN

Are you serious?

MIRABELLE

There's room in my house which is near the beach. I'll tell everyone I found a castaway, washed up on the shore.

GWENDOLYN

Everyone knows we hired you, so believe me, they'll know who Finoola is.

MIRABELLE

Then we'll make a public announcement; we'll tell the truth.

MARLIN

(to Doctor Swales) Did you know about this?!

DOCTOR SWALES

No.

MIRABELLE

I've told no one.

GWENDOLYN

It's very touching that you care so deeply for Finoola, but this is her home, and we should wait to see how she...thrives.

MIRABELLE

For two years she's been thriving. In that time, I've learned to delight in her gymnastics; in the vibrations of her voice, and the feel of her fishy skin; I want to teach her everything I know and swim by her side in the sea. Mister Welles, you accept but regret Finoola; Miss Gwen, you want to remake her in your own image, though she is already like you in that she's musical and may have dreams and desires, but her true nature, the essential Fin of Finoola, may be something yet unknown, and I will honor it, I promise.

GWENDOLYN

(pause) Your devotion's commendable, and I'm grateful, but Finoola emerged from my body with my genes, so she's mine, my responsibility.

MARLIN

Excuse me, Gwen, but I'm interested in Mirabelle's proposal. Frankly, I'm surprised at your resistance.

DOCTOR SWALES

Yes, why this sudden possessiveness?

GWENDOLYN

I thought she be lacking intelligence, but you've convinced me that she's bright, and beyond that she's important. What if your grandchildren choose to live in water? Or what if your great great grandchildren have no choice? By then, Arctic sea levels will have risen so whole continents could sink...

MIRABELLE

Yes, we've heard it before! We know how you will *use* Finoola, but I want to *know* her!

GWENDOLYN

"Know her?" You talk like she's going to grow up and stroll the beach with you! Do you think she'll go to school or have a career and a family? *(pause)* Look, Finoola what's known as a genetic chimera. She's more aquatic than terrestrial, so she'll contribute by showing us how she can do what we can't.

MIRABELLE

She's not a specimen; she's a human life, and every life is precious.

GWENDOLYN

I don't agree. Most lives are futile, and hers won't be long. Her piscine genes accelerate growth, so she'll only live a few more years.

MIRABELLE

(pause) Oh,...

GWENDOLYN

I'm sorry, I thought you knew. *(pause)* Listen, Mirabelle, someday you'll have a child of your own, a child who can sit in your lap, ride a bike, and run in the grass.

MIRABELLE

(pause, she sighs) If what you say is true, if Finoola is ours for only a short time, then please, Miss Gwen, Mister Welles, release her to me, and I will cherish her to the end of her days.

GWENDOLYN

That's very generous, and I don't mean to offend, but you can't possibly afford her.

MIRABELLE

But *you* can, so you'll help me. Of course, you may visit to observe her progress whenever you wish.

GWENDOLYN

Who the hell are you to tell us when we can visit?!

MIRABELLE

You know me well enough, Miss Gwen, just as I know you. Now please, place Finoola in my care, or I... I'll...

GWENDOLYN

You'll what?

MIRABELLE

I'll call the news channels, post videos, tattle and tweet to everyone I know!

GWENDOLYN

Do what you like; your employment here is terminated!

Gwen!
MARLIN

I won't be blackmailed!
GWENDOLYN

DOCTOR SWALES
Ladies, ladies, what's happening? We should be joining forces to fathom Finoola, not waging a custody battle!

GWENDOLYN
Pack your bags and be gone by tonight!

(MIRABELLE starts to leave, but MARLIN grasps her arm.)

MARLIN
Wait! Not so fast! *(to Gwendolyn)* I want to know who's taking over Mirabelle's duties?

DOCTOR SWALES
Don't count on me! Or Orma! Mirabelle's the one who feeds, cleans, and checks her vitals.

GWENDOLYN
We'll manage.

MARLIN
How, for godssake!?

DOCTOR SWALES
Are you willing to be a nurturing presence, to make her feel cared for and secure?

GWENDOLYN
Yes!

DOCTOR SWALES
Then let me see you touch her.

(GWENDOLYN approaches the tank and stares at FINOOLA.)

GWENDOLYN
She's asleep. I...I don't want to wake her.

DOCTOR SWALES

She repulses you, doesn't she? *(pause)* Look, I felt that way myself, and I sense your anxiety -- but so will she.

GWENDOLYN

It's true, I...I'm not afraid to say I find her... grotesque. Yes, I confess the enormity, the magnitude of misery I've caused, but Finoola's still my child, born in this world, in this time and place, and I want her to take part in it, an *acceptable* part, so trust me, I intend to conquer my revulsion.

DOCTOR SWALES

But what if you don't?

GWENDOLYN

I will! *(to Marlin)* And you'll help me. Otherwise she'll be a sideshow freak!

DOCTOR SWALES

But what about Finoola? What about her feelings? Surely you realize she'll miss Mirabelle terribly.

GWENDOLYN

So the sooner she leaves, the better.

MIRABELLE

(suppressing tears) What a fool I was, serving your needs, believing we were friends, but we're not, and you're not a mother either -- you're a cold blooded breeder.

GWENDOLYN

Get out!

MIRABELLE

A breeder!

(MIRABELLE dashes off.)

DOCTOR SWALES

(to Gwendolyn) I must say, you're making a huge mistake which I guarantee you'll regret. Frankly, I can't believe you're in your right mind.

GWENDOLYN

Please leave.

DOCTOR SWALES

You're obviously still suffering from the toxins you've ingested. They don't just go away, you know. They'll affect brain cells and behavior for the rest of your life. You don't need a child; what you need is a psychiatrist!

(DOCTOR SWALES marches off.)

GWENDOLYN

Whatever she says, we'll deny. If we need help, we'll find someone else.

MARLIN

Who for godssake?! Who on earth is like Mirabelle? Who else has her patience, her courage, her devotion?

GWENDOLYN

The Great Saint Mirabelle! You sound like you're in love with her yourself.

(As MARLIN and GWENDOLYN continue arguing, MIRABELLE appears packing in another area while ORMA and DOCTOR SWALES stand nearby.)

MARLIN

Maybe, but what I really am is...

MARLIN
...furious!

MIRABELLE
Furious,...

MIRABELLE

...I'm so furious, my eyes are on fire! I tell you, this is the worst day of my life, the very worst! First she'll cut Finoola's fins, then she'll want her blood and bones. Drive me home, Hurleigh! Then later, when they're asleep, I'll come back for her!

ORMA

You can't do that; that's kidnapping!

MIRABELLE

What time is it?

ORMA
It's noon.

MARLIN
It's noon,...

MARLIN

...time to feed Finula! Let's see, you'll also need to check her temperature, and don't forget to stroke her fins -- to console her for being the only one of her kind. *(pause)* Look at me, Gwen: you realize you've deprived our daughter of the one person who loves her?

GWENDOLYN

She's not *our* daughter, she's *mine*!

MARLIN

Legally I'm the father; I have parental rights, and I want Mirabelle back!

MIRABELLE

(to Orma and Doctor Swales) Some doulas say we never forget the flow of our mothers' blood pumping through our bodies. Years later blood remembers and awakens in a mother's presence, but I think what Finoola remembers is her swim in the sea which is why she's so restless in her tank, always weaving back and forth. That's why I'm taking her tonight, only tonight, for one last romp in the sea with all her fins flouncing away. Then I'll carry her back home, *(grasping Orma's hand)* and you'll help me.

ORMA

No way, man, no waaaaay!

MIRABELLE

(to Doctor Swales) Then you'll help!

DOCTOR SWALES

I will not! Stop talking rubbish!

ORMA

Whoa, I got the heebies just now, a cold shiver up my spine, right up my spine.

MIRABELLE

Hah! You've had that shiver since the day they came home!

MARLIN

(to Gwendolyn) Since the day we came home, I've had something to say: You'll have to forgive me, Gwen, but I know my limits...

GWENDOLYN

You're leaving; I knew you would.

MARLIN

It's happening again -- your obsession with Finoola, and I don't want any part of it. The fact is I have an offer from Scripps -- to join their team at McMurdo Station. They're measuring the ice shelves while they're still...

MARLIN

...frozen.

MIRABELLE

Frozen,...

MIRABELLE

...my heart feels like ice. We doulas are supposed to mother the mothers, but Miss Gwen is my failure. I've not fared well with her, not well at all.

ORMA

She's appalling, really appalling;...

ORMA

...I'm thinking of leaving myself.

GWENDOLYN

I'm thinking of leaving myself,...

GWENDOLYN

...I'll take Finula with me. Her piscene genes can adapt to cooler waters.

MARLIN

You don't know that.

GWENDOLYN

As a matter of fact, I do; I put them there -- at the blastocyst stage.

MARLIN

You what...?

GWENDOLYN

(pause) One of those days when it was so hot the planet seemed to be burning up, I...I yielded to an impulse. There was a petri dish of cultured germ cells, though I only expected the gills and digital membranes...

MARLIN

Stop it, Gwen, that's the mercury talking!

GWENDOLYN

No, it's the geneticist talking.

MIRABELLE

(to Doctor Swales) What you don't know is Miss Gwen deliberately planned it.

GWENDOLYN

(to Marlin) Don't you recognize the...

GWENDOLYN

...blue damsel chromosomes?

MIRABELLE

Blue damsel chromosomes...

MIRABELLE

...were transferred to her genes.

GWENDOLYN

I wanted our daughter to fathom the deepest depths.

MIRABELLE

Finoola will see creatures we've never imagined.

DOCTOR SWALES

No!

MARLIN

No,...

MARLIN

...she'll eat and be eaten, and then...

MARLIN

...she'll die.

DOCTOR SWALES

She'll die,...

DOCTOR SWALES

...be swept away and forgotten!

MIRABELLE

No!

MIRABELLE

She'll swim...

GWENDOLYN

She'll swim...

GWENDOLYN

...against the currents of history.

MIRABELLE

...against the tides of time.

(Darkness descends and shimmering lights reveal the Caribbean Sea where the older MIRABELLE speaks.)

MIRABELLE

Whenever I speak of that night, I relive the torment which began while wading in shallow water, feeling Finoola wiggling near my feet. I told her not to venture far, *(as her younger self)* stay close to Auntie Mirabelle. *(pause as she spins around)* Finoola...? Finoola, where are you? Finoola! Finooooolaaaa! I tell you, I called her name a thousand times, a thousand times! *(miming the breast stroke)* I kept swimming, my strokes rippling into larger and larger circles, none of which enclosed her, none! For five fretful hours I swam as the waves sprouted teeth and swallowed her in their froth, just swallowed her up! Finally, I swam back to shore; *(stepping onto the shore)* I put on my robe and paced the beach, scanning the water till sunrise. Then I walked to the estate where Mister Welles assured me...

MIRABELLE

...she can't have drowned.

MARLIN

She can't have drowned!

(Now the younger MIRABELLE is in the parlor, speaking to MARLIN, GWENDOLYN, and ORMA.)

MIRABELLE

(to Gwendolyn) I wasn't stealing her if that's what you're thinking! I only thought she'd want one last swim in the sea, one last frolic with her finned finery. Tell them, Orma.

ORMA

It's the truth. I warned her, but who listens to Orma? From now on, tie her to a line so you can reel her in, just reel her in.

MARLIN

If she's gone, is there proof she ever lived? Did Hurleigh ever register her birth?! Has anyone taken pictures?!

MIRABELLE

Doctor Swales drew her portrait.

ORMA

We recorded her voice.

MIRABELLE

Orma took pictures.

ORMA

My smartphone pictures are a poor likeness, very poor. Finoola's too damn slippery, and flips when she sees a flash -- man, how she hates that flash.

MIRABELLE

(starting to cry) She's so small, so helpless... Oh, Miss Gwen, Mister Welles, if she's gone, I'll never never forgive myself. Oh, the shame, the shame to have lost a child. We'll need help, Mister Welles, a search party. We'll need to explain, to tell people.

MARLIN

Tell them what...?

MIRABELLE

(pause, sadly) That a marvelous creature is lost...

GWENDOLYN

(softly) Yes,...a marvelous creature...

MIRABELLE

Come, we must go.

GWENDOLYN

No wait, there's something you should know. *(pause)* Last night after I fed her, I reached out to stroke her back, then her fins fanned upward and covered my hand like a glove. That's when I....I flinched. Oh, god help me, she unfurled her fins, turned away, and sank to the bottom of the tank. Before she turned, I saw her little chin quiver, so she knew. But I also saw myself: the shape of my lips, the color of my eyes, and she must also have my heart because mine seems to be missing. What I'm trying to say is that when we find her, I'm entrusting her to you, Mirabelle.

(GWENDOLYN walks off and MIRABELLE moves to follow.)

ORMA

Let her go. She's been low since Mister Welles told her the news: He's leaving Dolphina -- good bye sunshine, hello icebergs.

MIRABELLE

(to Marlin) Is this true?

MARLIN

Yes.

MIRABELLE

(pause) Come, Orma, we must start searching.

ORMA

Searching yes, but there's a storm brewing near Ocho Rios moving east, which means rip tides and big mother waves. And I've got the chills man, bad juju heebies, getting worse every day, so take Orma's advice -- search the beaches, but keep an eye on the water.

MARLIN

If we don't find her, I'll hire divers; I'll rent a submersible. In the meantime, contact your friends, send copies of Finoola's pictures, and tell them to join our search.

ORMA

My god, what if she washes up by one of the hotels? The tourists will get an eyeful, what an eyeful!

MARLIN

(to Mirabelle) I'll call Hurleigh to help. I'll start walking south of the Sagara jetty; you head west towards Marwan Bay.

ORMA

I'll go east to Calypso Cay.

(ORMA and MARLIN depart as MIRABELLE turns to the audience as her older self, strolling the beach.)

MIRABELLE

Before I left, my doula instinct told me to find Miss Gwen. When I spied her on the beach, I yelled, *(shouting as her younger self)* Miss Gwen! Don't go in the water! There's a storm coming!

GWENDOLYN

I don't care.

MIRABELLE

Drown your sorry self later, not now! *(grasping and pulling Gwendolyn by her hand)* Hold my hand! Quick, hold fast! Come with me!

GWENDOLYN

Where...?

MIRABELLE

Everywhere! We're going to find Finula; she's going to change the world!

(MIRABELLE and GWENDOLYN are joined by ORMA MARLIN, and DOCTOR SWALES, crisscrossing paths on the shorelines of Dolphina. A breeze ruffles their hair and clothes.)

MIRABELLE

Finoolaaaaaa!

GWENDOLYN

Finoolaaaaaa...?

MARLIN

Finoooooola!

DOCTOR SWALES

Finoola! Finoola!

ORMA

Fin Fin Finoolaaaaaaa!

(Their VOICES echo as the breeze becomes a howling wind, and lightning flashes! The wind blows to a thunderous frenzy that spins THEM off stage! There is darkness and silence, then FINOOLA'S song emerges from the sea, becoming amplified.)

FINULA'S WATERY VOICE

Laaaaaa, looooo, luuuuu...

(Lghts reveal MIRABELLE, wearing her bandana, addressing the audience. SHE is playing the recording of Finoola's song, then turns it off.)

MIRABELLE

Now I have stood before this illustrious assembly to explain the origins of what is now known as Pisces Baby Syndrome. We assumed that Finoola perished along with her mother, her father, and Orma Setimba in the worst hurricane of Dolphina's history. These natural disasters cause unnatural endings, so cruel, so abrupt -- our loved ones vanished in an instant! Doctor Swales and I survived, though we still mourn our dwindling Dolphina, along with the shorelines of your great continents. Farewell to the East, farewell to the West, and now, ladies and gentlemen, I am here to present a glimpse of the uncertain future.

(Lights dim as DOCTOR SWALES enters, twenty years older, escorting NERISSA BAPTISTE, a glimmering creature who walks with slow, swaying motions, her head bobbing, her hands twirling, her euphonious voice making watery musical sounds.)

NERISSA

Luuuuuu, laaaaa, laaaa...

MIRABELLE

Her name is Nerissa Baptiste. There are twelve known Pisces Babies who have in common the proximity of their mothers to islands that includes Dolphina, Jamaica, and the Caymans. Doctor Swales believes that while the mothers were swimming, Finoola's spermatoocytes penetrated their uterine walls, affecting the fetuses during the first months of their pregnancies. One of those mothers hired a doula -- which is how I made my discovery.

DOCTOR SWALES

Like the other Pisces Babies, Nerissa was born bald with gills, webbed feet, and dorsal fins that dropped off after a week. You can observe the silvery blue cast to her skin, and she is musical, intelligent, transgender, but predominately female. Her accelerated growth has made her equivalent to a girl of nineteen in only five years.

MIRABELLE

We've explained to Nerissa that we knew her grandmother, a splendid biologist who often reminded us that we were fish once too.

NERISSA

Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...

MIRABELLE

As for Finula: The West Indies Institute of Oceanic Studies has recorded sightings near Saint Ann's Bay, so there is speculation that she may be still alive. Sometimes we try to lure her by playing Orma's song, and now, if you care to listen...

(DOCTOR SWALES plays the recording of Orma's song. Then clasps MIRABELLE'S hand, while NERISSA dances as if the song possessed the power to enchant.)

ORMA'S VOICE

*Somewhere in the water
Is my daughter;
Somewhere in the water
Swimming free.
She's gone to find a home
Among the fishes;
She's gone to find her lover
In the sea.*

(The lights fade to a shimmering blue.)

End of Play

