

ATLAS OF MUD

by Jennifer Fawcett

April 2012

Jennifer Fawcett

(319) 594-9051

jennifer@workinggrouptheatre.org

Copyright © 2012 by Jennifer Fawcett

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Atlas of Mud was commissioned by the Canadian theatre company, Union Eight Theatre (Toronto/Owen Sound).

It was awarded the 2008 National Science Playwriting award by the Kennedy Center ACTF under the previous title, *Twenty Moments in the Space Between*.

Atlas of Mud has had public readings at the Kennedy Center Theatre Lab, directed by Anita Maynard-Losh; at the Lied Center in Lawrence, KS, as a special presentation of the 2009 American College Theatre Festival, directed by Ann Bergeron; and at Central Square Theatre and The Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard in Cambridge, MA, directed by Jay Scheib and produced by Underground Railway Theatre.

It has been developed at the Lark Play Development Center as part of Playwrights' Week, directed by Shana Gold; with Union Eight Theatre, directed by Nina Lee-Aquino; with Working Group Theatre, directed by Sean Christopher Lewis, and with the Inkwell directed by Lee Liebeskind. It was produced by Collins College in Plano, TX, directed by Gail Cronauer.

“Faith isn't faith until it's all you're holding on to.”

“Myths are things that never happen but always are.”

Sallustius

CHARACTERS

The play can be performed with six actors (3M, 3W).

ELAINE	<i>a glaciologist and evacuee, 30's; MUD's mother</i>
MARCUS	<i>a fellow glaciologist and ELAINE's lover</i>
BOATMAN	<i>a scavenger</i>
ELIAS	<i>a Reverend, 30's</i>
MIRIAM	<i>ELIAS' older sister, 40's</i>
EVACUEES	<i>various men and women</i>
SOLDIER	
BOY	<i>a teenager in a tree; his face is hidden</i>
MUD	<i>female: a child on the boat, 8</i>
BIRD KEEPER 1	<i>caring for the birds; a second class citizen on the boat (male)</i>
BIRD KEEPER 2	<i>caring for the birds; a second class citizen on the boat (female)</i>
BIRD KEEPER 3	<i>caring for the bird; a second class citizen on the boats (male)</i>
CAPTAIN	<i>in command of the boat</i>

Suggested doubling:

ELAINE
 ELIAS / CAPTAIN
 MIRIAM / BIRD KEEPER 2
 MARCUS / EVACUEE / BIRD KEEPER 3
 BOATMAN / SOLDIER / BIRD KEEPER 1
 MUD / BOY / EVACUEE

SETTING

Act One: a large city during disastrous storms and flooding (various locations)

Act Two: a boat, eight years after the world has flooded entirely

Note: the Prologue is set in the same time as Act Two

NOTES

The Beethoven composition referred to is the Second Movement his *Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major (Opus 24)* also known as the "Spring" Sonata. It was written around 1797, three years after Beethoven began to go deaf.

Radio announcements should overlap, distort and blur. They are written on separate lines in the script only to serve as a guide for what they should say and when (approximately) they should come. They shouldn't interrupt the action. All street names can be changed to the present location or kept general.

PROLOGUE: SKY

In the belly of a ship that floats over a flooded world. Night.

MUD, 8, sits up. She has just woken from a dream.

MUD

I was in the sky.

In my dream I was flying.

I saw land. It looked just like the Reverend told me it did.

And there were people – so many people. They were all moving towards the water. They didn't notice me so I swooped low over them looking for you.

There were boats – just like this one but hundreds and hundreds of them. And around every boat were soldiers. People were crowded onto the decks of the boat and all of them had suitcases and boxes. There was no room to move and still more people kept climbing on.

Then the horns blew and the boats started moving and the people on the land pushed towards the water. Some of them fell and the crowd moved over them like a wave. When they got to the edge, they jumped in and swam after the boats pushing their suitcases in front of them. Parents were pushing their children into the arms of the soldiers and the children were screaming and holding onto their parents' necks. There were so many people the water looked like it was swarming - like a monster with a thousand legs and arms. Some had little boats and they'd come alongside the big boats and were trying to climb up the sides -
BANG -

(The echo of distant gunshots)

And the people fell into the water and disappeared.

(More gunshots - louder, closer)

People on the decks were yelling but their screams were turning into caws and the air filled with birds.

(Sound of seagulls and gunshots)

I knew you were there.

I went higher and higher. And the higher I went, the more people I could see spreading out from the city towards the boats. I couldn't see you but I knew you were there.

(Sound of wind)

And as the boats moved farther away the water rose over the harbour and towards the city in giant waves and I knew.

I knew it was going to cover them all.

ACT ONE: LAND

SCENE ONE

A bedroom in Elaine's childhood home; the present. Night.

There is a large window. In it is the silhouette of a tree branch.

ELAINE stands in front of it looking out. She holds an atlas.

MARCUS enters. They've just made love. He comes behind her and points to a page in the atlas.

MARCUS

That's it - that's where we're going. I've seen the plans for the new research centre they're building at McMurdo - it's going to be incredible.

ELAINE

(In awe)

Antarctica.

MARCUS

The most inhospitable place on earth: Paradise.

ELAINE

Only for fools like us.

MARCUS

Scientists will be able to live there for years.

ELAINE

And you're going to see it.

MARCUS

Come back to bed. It's freezing.

He kisses her. She pulls away and laughs.

ELAINE

I still feel a little strange doing this in my parents' bedroom.

MARCUS

I assumed it was your room now.

ELAINE

It is now, I guess. When I was a girl, I'd only come in here because it was access to that tree. My secret hiding place. I'd climb out on the branch.

MARCUS

Three floors up?

ELAINE

Back in the days when I was fearless.

MARCUS

You always seemed pretty ballsy to me.

She goes back to the window.

ELAINE

When you walked into the lecture hall today I thought maybe I could - I don't know - find my way back.

MARCUS

We miss you at the lab.

ELAINE

It's not just the work. It's that feeling I used to get - like the answers were out there.

MARCUS

They are.

ELAINE

Are they?

MARCUS

They have to be.

ELAINE

But how do you know?

MARCUS

Because I don't believe –

ELAINE

That bad things just happen?

MARCUS

- without a reason. Yeah.

Neither do you, last time checked. Besides, if there aren't answers to be found then what the hell are we doing, any of us? I should just buy the biggest flat screen I can find and check out.

ELAINE

I can't see that happening.

MARCUS

Well, you neither.

ELAINE

But I don't know how I can keep doing the work if I don't know what I'm moving towards.

I watched my mother die.

MARCUS

I know. I'm sorry.

ELAINE

She was in so much pain and there was nothing science or medicine or I could do for her. There were no answers. And there was no reason.

MARCUS

Your mother died because we don't have a cure yet – but there are people working towards it. They don't know what it is, but they'll keep looking. That's their work. And this – Antarctica - is ours. It's who we are.

ELAINE

I can't leave yet.

MARCUS

I don't understand – there's nothing for you here now.

ELAINE

I need to get the house organized and I have my classes now. We're halfway through the semester - I can't just walk away.

MARCUS

You did before.

ELAINE

I had to be here.

No one else from the team even tried to make contact.

MARCUS

We didn't think you wanted us to.

I didn't come find you to make you feel guilty. All I'm saying is I think you're wasting your talent being here.

ELAINE

It's manageable. And it's not forever.

MARCUS

Well ... good.

Your students don't know how lucky they are. They've got a world class glaciologist teaching them Biology 101.

ELAINE

All they care about is whether they get a good grade on their midterm.

MARCUS

What's with the God freak down by the front – the blond. What's she doing in a science class if all she wants to talk about are Adam and Eve?

ELAINE

I'm her project. She's decided she needs to save me. Last week she left a Bible outside my office door.

MARCUS laughs.

ELAINE (*CONT'D*)

I guess I'm doing the same with her. Who's to say either of us is right.

MARCUS

Antarctica is changing, fast.

ELAINE

I know.

MARCUS

Did you see that last report from the Vostok Station? They're seeing CO₂ levels at twelve percent higher than even what the Australian team reported six months ago which means -

ELAINE

I read the report. I am trying to keep up.

MARCUS

The answers are there.

ELAINE

The answers are melting.

MARCUS

We're on the edge of finding information that can lead to change: to real change.

ELAINE
(Laughing)

I feel like we're back in grad school – dreaming about saving the world.

MARCUS doesn't laugh.

ELAINE
 I'm sorry. You're right - I know you're right.
 At least with your way of looking at it there's a way to move forward.
 I've missed this. There's no one here I can talk to about this.

Beat.

MARCUS
 I got the Heidelberg Grant.

ELAINE
 Oh. Wow. *Wow*. That's - congratulations. Why didn't you tell me before?

MARCUS
 Because you wanted it too.

ELAINE
 Yeah, well, I didn't hand in the application.

MARCUS
 After you left I thought one of us should.

ELAINE
(To herself)
 You got the Heidelberg...

MARCUS
 I'm going to be part of an international team. Russia, the UK, Germany -

ELAINE
 You told me it was a two-week trip with our team. That doesn't even compare.

MARCUS
 I didn't know how to tell you.

ELAINE
 How long are you going for?

MARCUS
 A year. Maybe more.

ELAINE
Well ... congratulations.

MARCUS
Thanks. It's a real honor.

ELAINE
This could lead to a Nobel.

MARCUS
Come with me.

ELAINE
I don't have funding –

MARCUS
Come as my assistant.
(No response)
We're each allowed to bring one. There's money set aside ...
(No response)
It's just a title.

ELAINE
No, it isn't.

MARCUS
I got it cleared. I didn't want to say anything until I knew for sure -

ELAINE
Your assistant?

MARCUS
It's just to get you on the boat. Once we're down there -

ELAINE
No.

MARCUS
You walked away over a year ago. I'm giving you a chance to come back.

ELAINE
I don't want your pity.

MARCUS
It's not pity – Jesus, Elaine –

ELAINE

Did you really think I'd be that desperate?

MARCUS

Yeah, I did. You used to be hungry -

ELAINE

Sorry to disappoint you.

MARCUS

What's happened to you?

ELAINE

You should have called me.

MARCUS

Well, I decided to come and find you instead. We were going to go to Antarctica together – we promised, remember?

ELAINE

I didn't know you were so sentimental.

MARCUS

I miss those moments when one of us would see something new - that feeling that anything was possible, that the world was opening itself right in front of us. It's not the same on my own.

ELAINE goes to the window.

ELAINE

They've had to close any road that's within a mile of the water because of the flooding. It takes forever to get anywhere now. Half the city's already been evacuated.

MARCUS

You need to get out of here.

*ELAINE goes to the stereo and turns it on.
Beethoven's Sonata No 5 for Violin and Piano
(Second Movement) plays.
MARCUS dresses.*

ELAINE

Beethoven wrote this three years after he started going deaf. Imagine, creating something this beautiful that you'd never be able to hear.

ELAINE (*CONT'D*)

I wish I could have faith like that.
 I used to hide up in that tree and listen to my mother and father play this piece. It was like their secret language.
 After Dad died, Mom would play her part – it was like she was calling out to him. Like a bird calling out to its mate.
 The nurse told me it got to a point when Mom was so weak, she couldn't lift the violin. She'd just sit there with it in her lap.
 And I wasn't here.

MARCUS

I know.

He goes to her to kiss her. She turns away.

MARCUS

I have to be in Chile a week from tomorrow, that's where we're assembling.

ELAINE

You should get on the road. You don't want to get stuck here.

He pulls an envelope out of his jacket pocket and gives it to her.

MARCUS

It's a plane ticket, in case you change your mind.

*He leaves.
 The rain starts.*

*Outside a red light begins to pulse.
 The pulsing illuminates the tree branch silhouette.
 The Beethoven distorts into the static of emergency radio broadcasts.*

The transition begins:

SCENE TWO

The flooded city.

The power goes out.

In the darkness we hear the winding and tuning of crank radios.

Static.

Lights rise on a flooded world.

The EVACUEES appear. Each holds a crank radio.

Overlapping:

RADIO: "A MANDATORY EVACUATION HAS BEEN ISSUED"

RADIO: "A STATE OF EMERGENCY HAS BEEN DECLARED FOR THE METRO AREA-"

ELAINE dials her cell phone.

ELAINE

Pick up your phone...

RADIO: "MOTORISTS ARE ADVISED TO FIND ALTERNATE ROUTES - ALL MAJOR HIGHWAYS ARE JAMMED. WE REPEAT: MOTORISTS MUST FIND AN ALTERNATE ROUTE -"

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Marcus, it's me again. It's getting bad here. My battery's going to die and I need to talk to you -

RADIO: "IF YOU SEE WATER ON THE ROAD DO NOT DRIVE THROUGH IT, I REPEAT, IF YOU SEE WATER ON THE ROAD-"

RADIO: "WELL OUR MAIN CONCERN RIGHT NOW IS THE WATER SUPPLY."

ELAINE tunes her crank radio.

ELAINE

Weather report, come on...

Her radio plays static, then, faintly, the Beethoven piano sonata -

ELAINE'S RADIO (a child's voice):

"There were so many people in the water. I was looking for you -"

ELAINE
 What? I don't understand.

EVACUEE'S radios continue (overlapping):
RADIO: "THE FOLLOWING BRIDGES AND ROAD CLOSURES ARE EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY: PINE ST, FIRST AVENUE-"

RADIO: "NATIONAL LIFE HOME AND AUTO INSURANCE LTD. REMINDS DRIVERS TURN AROUND AND DON'T DROWN!"

ELAINE'S RADIO:
"Are you still there? Are you looking for me?"

ELAINE
(To the radio)
 Who are you? Hello? Can you hear me?

RADIO: "A CURFEW IS EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY FROM 6PM UNTIL 6AM FOR ANY AREA WITHIN 700 FEET OF FLOODWATER."

ELAINE'S RADIO
The water's moving over the city where you are.

ELAINE
 Who are you talking to?

ELAINE'S RADIO
You have to get to the boats.

ELAINE
 What boats? I don't understand.

ELAINE'S RADIO

Mama?

ELAINE
 Tell me where you are and I'll try to send someone to get you.

Sound of a window smashing. ELAINE tries her phone again.

RADIO: "REPORTS OF LOOTING-"

RADIO: "DO NOT ENTER A FLOODED BUILDING YOURSELF."

RADIO: "AVOID ALL CONTACT WITH FLOOD WATER."

More sounds of breaking glass, voices calling out.

ELAINE
(Calling out)

Help – someone, please - there are people in my house.

ELAINE grabs a huge suitcase and frantically throws clothes into it. She keeps the radio with her.

ELAINE'S RADIO

Come and find me, Mama.

ELAINE

Okay – I'm coming.

ELAINE'S RADIO

I'm out here. I'm waiting for you.

ELAINE

You have to keep talking to me and I'll find you.

Two gunshots are heard. They're close.

RADIO: "THE CITY HAS ISSUED A BOIL WATER ADVISORY"

Static

The EVACUEES hold suitcases over their heads and walk slowly, as if through deep water.

The BOATMAN enters.

ELAINE

You – please – help me.

BOATMAN

Come on – get in.

ELAINE gets in the boat.

BOATMAN

Anybody else in there?

ELAINE

I heard shots. I heard shots downstairs. They broke in – I don't know how many -

The tree branch appears (in silhouette). A figure climbs out onto it. He clutches a backpack to his chest.

BOATMAN

It's just a kid.

(Calling out)

Hey kid - you gotta jump -

ELAINE

No - not him.

BOATMAN

Come on kid, I don't got all day.

ELAINE

No. He's one of them. Leave him.

BOATMAN

I'm supposed to take kids first.

ELAINE

He's a thief. Let's go - please -

BOATMAN

You want me to leave him behind? In this?

ELAINE

He broke into my house – he's got a gun. Just go – Go!

BOATMAN

Whatever you say, lady.

The light fades on the figure in the tree as they move away.

ELAINE

Another boat will get him. Right?

(To herself)

Another boat will get him.

The EVACUEES open their suitcases and tip them.

*The sound of water pouring out.
Darkness.
Only small red lights on the radios are seen.*

SCENE THREE

A shelter on the outskirts of the city.

*ELAINE stands with her suitcase, lost.
A light comes up on ELIAS, preaching. Some
EVACUEES gather around him.*

ELIAS

“As it was in the beginning, is now and forever shall be, world without end.”
How many times have I said these words? Simple words. Recognizable words.
I thought I knew what they meant. But in the past week what was known and
what was unknown got all switched up.

EVACUEE

Amen.

*His sermon continues over the EVACUEES’
questions. Each EVACUEE holds a suitcase and a
photo. One approaches ELAINE.*

EVACUEE 1

Have you seen this woman?

ELAINE

No, I’m sorry.

ELIAS (*CONT’D*)

Is this the end? Or is this the beginning?

EVACUEE 1

It’s my wife.

ELIAS (*CONT’D*)

What if we are returning to the beginning now? How do we begin again?

ELAINE

I’m sure you’ll find her.

ELIAS (*CONT’D*)

How do we re-build our world?

ELAINE

Do you know – are there buses?

ELIAS (*CONT'D*)

I'm not just speaking of insurance money to replace possessions; of wood, concrete or plaster. We must re-build our society.

EVACUEE 2

Eric? Eric?

ELIAS (*CONT'D*)

And what do we build from?

EVACUEE 2

Have you seen Eric?

ELAINE

No.

ELIAS (*CONT'D*)

We are the building materials.

The water has passed over the barriers between us. We have become one.

EVACUEE 3

Have you seen this girl?

ELAINE

No, I'm sorry.

ELIAS (*CONT'D*)

We are at a beginning again.

EVACUEE 3

(Another photo)

She can't swim.

ELIAS (*CONT'D*)

"As it was in the beginning."

Join me now:

Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him -

ELAINE

(Loud)

No - please - just stop asking me.

*The EVACUEES all stop and look at her.
ELIAS approaches.*

ELIAS

Come on, she said she didn't know.

He moves the EVACUEE away from ELAINE.

ELAINE

I don't mean to be rude to them. They just keep asking.

ELIAS

Are you looking for someone?

ELAINE

I thought I'd see someone from my neighborhood or at least one of my students but I don't recognize anybody...

The first EVACUEE comes back.

EVACUEE 1

Excuse me, have you seen this woman?

ELAINE

You already asked me.

EVACUEE 1

My wife. She went to work and then the water came.

He wanders away.

ELIAS

If you've just arrived, you need to get registered to get a bed. There are volunteers with clipboards who can direct you.

ELAINE

I don't want to stay here. I need to get to the airport.

ELIAS

The airport's closed. The runway's flooded.

ELAINE

But where do I go?

ELIAS

For now it's probably safest for you to stay here. They'll start sending buses soon to get people out of the city.

ELAINE

It's so disorganized. There are no signs. I can't even find a water fountain that's working.

ELIAS

(Offering his bottle of water)

Here.

ELAINE drinks. She finishes it.

ELAINE

Thank you. Sorry.

ELIAS

There isn't any more room for people on this level, but I've heard they're opening some of the classrooms on the third floor for the newcomers.

ELAINE

How'd it fill up so fast?

ELIAS

Most of the people on the ground level have been here for two weeks now. There are some rules you should be aware of. It's important that you only use the bathroom on the level they put you on. And the water – there's a supply of water brought in each morning. Each level gets its own supply. There have been some problems with new people who don't know the rules.

ELAINE

Okay.

ELIAS

The lists are by the entrance. You would have passed them when you came in.

ELAINE

The lists..?

ELIAS

The lists – people at other shelters, people who've been found, the ones who are still missing. It's also where you put your name, so people know where to find you.

ELAINE

I don't think there's any one who's trying to find me.

ELIAS

Or if there's anyone you're looking for, you can put a photo up -

ELAINE

I'm alone.

ELIAS

Oh. Well, I guess you're lucky -

ELAINE

Thanks for your help. I don't want to keep you from your work.

ELIAS

This is my work. If you want a bed, you should get registered. They go quickly.

ELAINE

This is just where they brought me but I thought if there were buses - or I could hire a taxi.

ELIAS

I'm afraid no one's leaving yet. There just isn't anywhere for people to go.

ELAINE

I can't stay here -

ELIAS

It's just temporary. My sister and I have been here for a week. You get used to it.

MIRIAM (*OFFSTAGE*)

Elias?

ELIAS

That's her now.

MIRIAM enters. She sees ELAINE.

ELAINE

Miriam?

MIRIAM

What are you doing here?

ELAINE

I was evacuated -

ELIAS
You know each other?

ELAINE
(To ELIAS)
Miriam used to work for my mother.

MIRIAM
(To ELAINE)
Is Jonah with you?

ELIAS
Why would he be with her?

ELAINE
Who's Jonah?

MIRIAM
Have you seen him? I told him to go to your house.

ELAINE
That whole area has been evacuated.

MIRIAM
It's got that high.

ELAINE
The water's up to the second floor.

ELIAS
If they were evacuating that area, he's probably coming in now-

MIRIAM
But he went to your house –

ELAINE
I don't understand –

MIRIAM
Didn't you see him?

ELAINE
I didn't see anybody.

MIRIAM

I told him your mother would help him. She always said we could come to your family. Where is she?

ELIAS

Miriam, calm down.

ELAINE

My mother passed away five months ago.

MIRIAM

What?

ELIAS

(To ELAINE)

I'm sorry.

MIRIAM

But I sent Jonah to your house. Are you sure you didn't see him?

ELAINE

They're still bringing people out -

MIRIAM

He's fifteen but he's still small. He always carries a backpack.

ELAINE

I'm sorry -

ELIAS

If she said he wasn't there -

MIRIAM

(To ELIAS)

He never should have been downtown in the first place. If you'd gone to get him-

ELIAS

We're going to find him, okay?

MIRIAM

I'm going to find someone to take me down there.

ELIAS

He's in the area where the rescues are happening.

MIRIAM

You have to go out there again.

ELIAS

Maybe he's at one of the other shelters. I'll go and look at the lists again.

MIRIAM

I've looked at the lists.

ELIAS

You have to have faith –

MIRIAM

Faith? In what?

ELIAS

The rescuers are out there twenty-four hours a day –

MIRIAM

Your faith is just an excuse to stay here instead of going out there to find him.

ELIAS

I've gone out –

MIRIAM

Then go again. He's just a child.

MIRIAM exits.

ELIAS

Miriam – wait. I'm sorry. I have to go.

ELIAS hurries after MIRIAM.

An EVACUEE approaches ELAINE, holding out a photo.

EVACUEE 1

Excuse me, have you seen this woman? She can't swim –

ELAINE

I haven't seen her.

Another EVACUEE (4) approaches with a photo.

EVACUEE 4

Have you seen this boy? He never came home from school –

ELAINE
No – please -

EVACUEE
You're not looking –

EVACUEE 4
Look again. Look at his face.

EVACUEE 1
You must have seen her. She's out there –

ELAINE
I don't know these people - I've never seen these people – get away from me.

*The EVACUEES back away.
ELAINE sinks onto the floor.*

Somewhere radios crank up:

*RADIO: "HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO GO BACK TO GET
MORE OF OUR THINGS, BUT HE DIDN'T COME BACK-"*

*RADIO: "SYLVIA, IF YOU'RE OUT THERE - I'M AT THE
EAST SCARBOROUGH SHELTER. I'M WAITING FOR YOU."*

SCENE FOUR

Night at the shelter.

People sleep on suitcases.

ELAINE sits on the floor. She tries to tune her crank radio.

ELAINE'S RADIO

"Are you still there? Are you looking for me?"

ELAINE

Hello? Hello, can you hear me?

The EVACUEES start to wake up, annoyed.

ELIAS enters and calms them. He approaches ELAINE.

ELIAS

(Whispering)

Can't sleep?

ELAINE

I was trying to hear...

ELIAS

A weather report?

ELAINE

If someone was lost, they could call out to people on the radio, right?

ELIAS

Are you looking for someone?

ELAINE

I just thought I'd heard... never mind. It's ridiculous.

ELIAS

What did you hear?

ELAINE

I keep thinking I'm hearing a child's voice on the radio.

ELIAS

Some of the radio stations are going into the shelters so people can call out to their families. Maybe that's it.

ELAINE

Maybe. Don't you sleep?

ELIAS

I can't. They're bringing more in. I have to go look.

ELAINE

More people? There's no room.

ELIAS

The ones who drowned.

ELAINE

They bring them here?

ELIAS

They have to be identified. It's in another part of the building, don't worry.

ELAINE

Where?

ELIAS

The basement.

Can I...? Do you mind if I sit here for a bit before I go to look?

He sits down beside her.

ELAINE

I was having this dream. It was so vivid.

ELIAS

About?

ELAINE

Boats. Huge boats - like ocean liners.

I was in a harbour and there were all these boats lined up and thousands of people were getting on them, or trying to. Then, the boats blew their horns and started moving away from the pier, and people jumped into the water and were trying to swim after them. There were soldiers shooting at the people but they wouldn't stop - more and more jumped into the water.

There was someone on one of the boats who I was waving to but I don't know who it was, I just knew I had to keep waving.

And there were all these birds. All different types, just circling above us...

What's today?

ELIAS

Wednesday, I think.

ELAINE pulls the plane ticket out of her coat.

ELAINE

I could have flown to Chile today, to Punta Arenas, at the southernmost tip. There's a boat there that's going to Antarctica.

ELIAS

What's in Antarctica?

ELAINE

Ice. *(She laughs)* A lot of ice.

ELIAS

And...?

ELAINE

Ice is history told in water. It's the most complete - the most perfect record of the earth's climate that we have. And it's suspended in deep ice cores in Antarctica.

ELIAS

Like a time capsule.

ELAINE

Right, made one snowfall at a time. If we study what's happened before, and what's happening in Antarctica now, then maybe we can get a sense of what's coming.

ELIAS

And stop it?

ELAINE

Probably not. But maybe find ways to slow it down, so we can adapt.

ELIAS

You're a scientist.

ELAINE

A glaciologist.

ELIAS

And you believe the answers exist, even if you can't see them.

ELAINE

I do – I did. It’s complicated. My reasons for doubting are more personal than scientific.

ELIAS

“Reason is our soul’s left hand, Faith her right.” That’s John Donne.

ELAINE

Faith.

ELIAS

Yes.

ELAINE

I’m not really into the whole God thing.

ELIAS

You don’t have to be to have faith.

ELAINE

I believe in cause and effect. There are reasons for everything. There are patterns.

ELIAS

And you understand these patterns, in the ice?

ELAINE

It’s not that simple. But sure, yes, I can look at information that’s taken from long periods of time – epochs – and I believe, or I used to believe, there are patterns there. And patterns repeat, or if they don’t there’s a reason, so...

ELIAS

And this work you’re doing, with the ice, is it still going on?

ELAINE

My research partner is on the way to Antarctica right now.

ELIAS

It must feel good to know that your work could actually make a difference.

ELAINE

It’s not my work anymore. I left. I stopped being able to see the patterns.

The cause and effect.

My mother made beautiful music. It’s what she gave to the world. The type of cancer she had was supposed to be manageable, but nothing worked. Then pain medications were supposed to block out the pain, but they didn’t. Nothing that

ELAINE (*CONT'D*)

was supposed to work, worked. Including me. Her only child and I was so caught up in my work... By the time I came home she was too far gone.

ELIAS

You can't blame yourself for that.

ELAINE

There must have been something I could have done.

ELIAS

Did you know that almost every ancient culture, from all over the world – Inca, Egyptians, Aborigines – they each had a story about the world being destroyed by a great flood. Isn't that fascinating.

ELAINE

People settle by water. Rivers flood.

ELIAS

But in each of those stories, mankind got a second chance.

ELAINE

So this is our second chance?

ELIAS

It could be.

ELAINE

Yeah, well, they also thought that killing virgins would help the corn grow. Maybe we're out of chances.

ELIAS

Maybe.

ELAINE

In those stories, only a few people are saved. So where's that leave the rest of us?

ELIAS

Maybe you'll be one of the lucky ones.

ELAINE

It's a dangerous way to think. We don't take any responsibility - we just wait for the "gods" to save us. Those are just stories people told themselves to explain the unexplainable and somewhere along the way we forgot they were stories and started to think they were true.

ELIAS

If it gives people comfort...

ELAINE

Sure, ignorance is very comfortable. Until you end up on the floor of a shelter with nothing but a suitcase.

ELIAS

I should let you get back to sleep.

ELIAS starts to exit then stops, as if afraid.

ELAINE

Do you want me to go with you?

ELIAS

You'd do that?

ELAINE

Yes.

ELIAS

It's okay. Thank you though. You're very kind.

ELAINE

No, I'm not.

ELIAS exits.

She picks up the plane ticket and rips it into tiny pieces.

The silhouette of the tree branch appears.

The BOY sits on the branch.

He's wearing a baggy sweatshirt with the hood pulled up, hiding his face. He clutches a backpack.

ELAINE stares at him.

BOY

You've got to help me.

ELAINE

Why were you in my house?

BOY

She said you'd help me. Don't leave me here.

ELAINE

I'm sorry –

BOY

They're looking for me but they won't find me now.

Two gunshots ring out.

Lights fade on him

MIRIAM enters and begins to cross in the same direction as ELIAS.

ELAINE

Miriam, are you going to the basement?

MIRIAM

Why?

ELAINE

Elias is down there now.

MIRIAM

He is. Good.

ELAINE

Why put yourself through that if you don't have to? I'm sure Jonah's not down there.

MIRIAM hesitates. She approaches ELAINE.

MIRIAM

I'm sorry about your mother. She was very kind.

ELAINE

Sometimes I forget that she's gone. I catch myself thinking, "oh, I need to call Mom."

MIRIAM

When Jonah was a baby, she used to play her violin for him. It was the only thing that would soothe him sometimes.

ELAINE

Mom always said you were part of the family.

MIRIAM

She used to tell me about all the awards you were winning. She'd say, "my daughter's going to change the world."

ELAINE

When she was diagnosed she refused to go into a nursing home.

MIRIAM

She was afraid to go.

ELAINE

She was? Why didn't she tell me?

MIRIAM

She didn't want to be a burden on you. I always made sure she was comfortable.

ELAINE

I know Mom really relied on you. I did too.

MIRIAM

Your mother trusted me.

ELAINE

But she needed qualified care.

MIRIAM

When you fired me, I couldn't find another job.

We lost our apartment.

I had to pull Jonah out of his school. The schools up here aren't good. He started getting into trouble –

ELAINE

If you had told me -

MIRIAM

I don't beg.

ELAINE

Miriam –

MIRIAM

What do you want?

ELAINE

Want? Nothing. You're the only person I know here. We know each other. In a time like this -

MIRIAM

You mean now that you're here – with us.

ELAINE

I mean we've both lost someone –

MIRIAM

You'll never know loss until you lose a child.

MIRIAM exits.

*The shelter is quiet. The EVACUEES sleep.
ELAINE lies awake.*

*The BOATMAN enters. He carries large bags but
moves silently. He picks through people's
belongings, scavenging.*

ELAINE sees him.

He notices her.

*They look at each other across the EVACUEES.
She goes to leave. He stops her.*

BOATMAN

Where you going in such a hurry?

ELAINE

Nowhere. Excuse me.

BOATMAN

Nowhere. Going nowhere at three in the morning. You don't want to go out there. It ain't safe for someone like you.

She tries to go.

BOATMAN

I know you. Where do I know you from?

ELAINE

I don't know.

BOATMAN

I never forget a face.

ELAINE

I don't know you.

BOATMAN

My boat - I got you out of your house.

ELAINE

Just let me past please. I won't say anything.

BOATMAN

Say anything about what?

ELAINE

What you're doing -

BOATMAN

I'm not doing anything.
Wonder what happened to that kid.

ELAINE

I don't know what you're talking about.

BOATMAN

You don't remember? The kid in the tree by your house. You left him there.

ELAINE

He was a thief. He broke into my house.

BOATMAN

You should be careful what you go accusing people of.

ELAINE

You said you'd go back for him.

BOATMAN

I already risked my life once saving you. Come to think of it, I did pass by your house the next day. Didn't see him though.

ELAINE

It wasn't my fault -

BOATMAN

I ain't placing blame. Sometimes I saw people but I didn't stop. Went on a feeling. I had a good feeling about you though. You should show some gratitude.

ELAINE

My boyfriend will be down here any moment -

BOATMAN

Boyfriend. Well, well. You work quickly, don't you. Couple of nights on the floor and she's got herself a boyfriend.

(Close)

If you were looking for company you should have told me.

ELAINE

Look, I don't have any money -

BOATMAN

Let's trade instead. That's the way it works now. Look at this -

(Pulling various objects out of his bags)

I don't know why I packed all this. Can't carry it all. Gotta unload some of it.

He pulls out the violin case.

ELAINE

Where did you get that?

BOATMAN

This? It's mine. Had it for years. Didn't want to let it drown. You like it?

ELAINE takes the violin case.

ELAINE

This was my mother's.

BOATMAN

I don't think so.

ELAINE

Look, "L.M. 1974" - those are her initials.

BOATMAN

You want it, you got to give me something for it.

ELAINE

You stole that from my house. Is that what all of this is?

BOATMAN

I saved it.

ELAINE

Give it back.

BOATMAN

You didn't want it bad enough to take it the first time –

ELAINE

You weren't rescuing people – you were getting them out of the way.

BOATMAN

Wonder if anyone in here's looking for that kid. They'd want to know what happened to him.

(Grabbing her radio)

I could use something like this.

ELAINE

Don't touch that.

ELAINE tries to grab the radio back. He pushes her away.

ELAINE

Just give me the violin and I won't say anything.

BOATMAN

Say anything about what?

He starts to move towards her threateningly.

ELAINE

About what you're – what you're -

BOATMAN

Say anything about what?

ELAINE

What you're doing –

BOATMAN
(Grabbing her)

What am I doing?

ELAINE

Let go of me.

BOATMAN

I saved your life. You owe me for that.

ELAINE

I told you – I don't have any money.

BOATMAN

You hear about the guy on the first floor? Yesterday he stole water rations from a kid. This morning he didn't wake up. People get crazy in times like these – especially when there's kids involved.

ELAINE

What do you want from me?

BOATMAN

Depends. How much is a secret worth to you?

ELAINE

Tomorrow.

BOATMAN

Now.

ELAINE

There are people.

BOATMAN

Better be quiet then.

She sits. He pushes her onto her back and lies on top of her.

The silhouette of the tree appears. The BOY sits on the tree branch, watching ELAINE.

BOY

You gotta help me. That's why I came to you.

ELAINE

I can't help anybody.

BOY

You left me here.

ELAINE

I didn't know –

BOY

Are you going to tell them what you did?

*Two gunshots. The BOY disappears.
The BOATMAN finishes. He goes to leave.*

ELAINE

The violin.

BOATMAN

Another debt then.

ELAINE

Give me the violin.

BOATMAN

See you tomorrow night.

He kicks the violin towards ELAINE and walks off.

SCENE FIVE

Later, that same night.

ELAINE sits huddled by her suitcase, holding the violin.

ELIAS enters. He sees her and approaches.

ELIAS

Elaine?

No response.

ELIAS

Are you okay?

She turns away from him.

ELIAS

Did something happen?

ELAINE

Please - go away.

ELIAS

What happened?

ELAINE

He got me out and then he went back to my house.

ELIAS

Someone here? Did someone hurt you?

ELAINE

Just go away - leave me alone.

ELIAS

Let me help you -

ELAINE

They let him - they saw him ...

ELIAS

Who? Where is he?

ELAINE

No, don't, please -

ELAINE (*CONT'D*)

He got me out of my house and then he went back and took it.
But I got it back. I traded for it.
That's how it works now, right?

ELIAS

I don't know. Is it?

ELAINE

(*Holding the violin*)

My mother wanted to teach me how to play. Ever since she died, it's like I'm in a free fall. I don't know where the bottom is. I just want to go away. To find a little space - a place to start over.

ELIAS

Look, there's a place I go to sometimes. It's nothing fancy but it's safe and it's away from the city. It's in a bird sanctuary. I can take you there.

ELAINE

A bird sanctuary?

ELIAS

It's just a hut. It's in an old nature preserve. The bird keepers are friends – they'll leave you alone. You can wait this out there.

ELAINE

But what about my house?

ELIAS

Whatever damage is going to happen to your house has probably already been done.

ELAINE

Everything I have is in there.

ELIAS

It's just stuff, let it go. There are more important things now. You need to find a safe place. I need to find my son.

ELAINE

Your son?

ELIAS

Jonah is my son.

ELAINE

I didn't know.

ELIAS

Miriam raised him because I was too young. Too young and too stupid. I keep thinking he's around the corner, he's somewhere in the crowd, I just have to keep looking, keep awake.

ELAINE

Do you really think he would have gone to my house?

ELIAS

Miriam talked to him before the worst of the storm hit. She told him if he got stuck, to go there. He remembered it from when she used to work there.

ELAINE

But she told him to look for my mother. So if he got there and didn't see her...

ELIAS

He's a fifteen year old who didn't like to be told what to do, especially by my sister. At this point, he could be anywhere. We have to have faith. All of us. Come on. They're sending buses in the morning. We might as well line up now. We can find one that'll drop us close to the sanctuary then we can walk in.

ELAINE

Why are you helping me?

ELIAS

Because I can. I don't know if I can help any of these people. I used to think I could but now, I don't know. But I can help you.

They exit.

SCENE SIX

MIRIAM holds the BOY'S backpack. Behind her is the silhouette of the tree.

MIRIAM

Jonah means “dove”. Did I ever tell you that? I think that would have been good for you to know while you were up there.

When you were very young and you’d done something you knew you shouldn’t have, you’d crawl into my lap and bury your head in my chest and you wouldn’t let me look in your eyes until I told you that no matter what, you were still my good boy.

Miriam means “strong water”. We don’t choose our own names, do we. But maybe our names give us a certain ... ending.
Strong water. Did I wash you away?

She takes a gun out of the backpack.

You were scared and you found this and you wanted to have it to feel safe.
Yes. To feel its weight.
You wanted me to know that you had this, that’s why you left it for me.
It’s okay. I understand. I’m glad you had it.
I wish you’d kept it.

Jonah, were you swallowed by a fish?
Did you fly away?
You don’t ... People don’t ... just ... disappear.
They leave.
They run away.
They fall.
From great heights, they fall.

SCENE EIGHT

Several weeks later. Elias' hut in the bird sanctuary.

In the distance, the sound of birds.

ELAINE sits with her radio. She tunes it but only gets static.

ELAINE

Where are you? Are you still out there?

ELIAS enters with bags of food.

ELAINE

You're back. You were gone so long I was afraid you weren't coming back.

ELIAS

It took me longer to find enough food. And the buses are so crowded it's hard to get on them.

ELAINE

Has Jonah - ?

ELIAS

Not yet.

ELAINE

But it's been three weeks.

ELIAS

We'll keep looking.

ELAINE

Did you go to my house?

ELIAS

Yeah.

ELAINE

And you found the safe? Did you get the money? We should be able to buy enough food.

ELIAS

There's nothing in it.

ELAINE

That's not possible.

ELIAS

People have been in the house. There's a lot of damage.

ELAINE

Is there anything left? Anything we can sell?

ELIAS

I found this.

He takes out a blue egg.

ELAINE

An egg? That's it? That's all that's left?

ELIAS

It had fallen out of that big tree beside your house. The ground's so soft it didn't break. I saved it because it might still be alive.

She takes it.

ELAINE

It's beautiful.

She goes to give it back to him. He doesn't take it.

ELIAS

There are things about me that if you knew... Things I've done.

ELAINE

But that's not who you are now.

ELIAS

The past never goes away, does it. I used to think I could just walk away and reinvent myself. But it always comes back.

I was seventeen when Jonah was born. Just a few years older than he is now. He wasn't even real to me until the doctor gave him to me.

The next day, I went back to the hospital and my girlfriend – his mother – was gone.

And there was Jonah.

So I brought him home to Miriam. And that night he started crying. He cried and cried. And I wished I'd done what his mother had done. I wished I'd never gone back to the hospital. For the rest of my life, I thought, I'll have this being who needs me.

And I will fail constantly.

I hated him. My son.

So the next day, I left. I just walked away. It wasn't the first time. I'd hitch to a town, get a job for a week, then keep moving. As if I could get far away enough from, what, myself? One morning, I fell asleep on a park bench and I dreamt I was up in the sky. I wasn't flying, I was being carried by this enormous flock of birds. I was part of this huge force of energy. And I was safe. This flock was so big, I couldn't see where it began or ended. As if they were circling the entire planet. And I was a part of it. We were all part of it. Something so much bigger than all of us. And then they were gone. And I was falling.

There was this church across from the park. I don't know what got me off that bench but I went in. I thought, they will see what I've done and they'll close the door in my face. But no one said anything. They let me just sit there. I watched people come in and pray. They were different – when they left, they were changed. And then the Reverend came over and sat down next to me. He just sat there silently for a few minutes and then he said, “you are welcome here.” Being in there felt like it had with the birds. The chaos was still there but it was separate from me – it wasn't something I had to control. And I swore that I would change – I would do whatever I had to do to not lose that feeling. I went back to that church every day just to sit there. Eventually, I got a job and went to school and one day I showed up on Miriam's doorstep wearing a suit and carrying a Bible. I'd been gone for eight years. My son didn't know me. He thought Miriam was his mother. It seemed easier to keep it that way. Jonah's fifteen now. He's run away a few times, but he always comes back. Now, every day that I can't find him, the chaos feels like its coming closer. And praying and talking about God - it's getting harder. It's starting to feel like a lie.

ELAINE

What about faith? Everything you said before?

ELIAS

Maybe that's nothing more than a comforting idea. Can you see ideas?

ELAINE

I used to think I could. I used to think I had to prove everything. I don't know who this child is or how she can talk to me, but I'm going to keep trying to talk to her. It's something to believe in.

ELIAS

You should keep that egg. I don't trust myself with it.

She goes to her suitcase and pulls out some money.

ELAINE

This is what I have left. Maybe you could buy some seeds. I can expand the garden.

ELIAS

I'll try.

He takes the money.

ELAINE

When you find Jonah, you could bring him here.

ELIAS

He'd like that. He's always loved birds.

ELAINE

I used to have flying dreams too. I'd run down the stairs in our house and right before I hit the bottom I'd fly up. I'd live in the sky if I could.

She opens her arms wide.

ELAINE

Humans have never been able to fly. For all our intelligence...

ELAINE

We're going to be okay.

ELIAS

Are we?

ELAINE

Yes.

She kisses him.

ELAINE

Even if we can't see it.

They kiss as the lights fade.

SCENE NINE

The shelter.

The static and buzzing of the radios is constant.

MIRIAM sits amongst the EVACUEES, lost.

ELIAS enters.

He sees her and hesitates. She sees him.

MIRIAM

Where have you been? I haven't seen you in weeks.

ELIAS

I've been out looking.

MIRIAM

Where is Elaine?

ELIAS

She's gone.

MIRIAM

She shouldn't get to leave this place.

ELIAS

What?

MIRIAM

She should have to stay here and wait with everybody else.

ELIAS

You're being ridiculous.

MIRIAM

Am I? Look.

She holds up Jonah's backpack.

ELIAS

Where did you find it?

MIRIAM

In the tree outside her house. He was there.

ELIAS

Why would he be in the tree?

MIRIAM

So the boats could see him. She wouldn't let him in the house and -

ELIAS

She wouldn't do that.

MIRIAM

You don't know her like I do. He was downtown – he knew her house. He knew he could go there. And she shows up claiming she never saw him but I find his schoolbag in the tree. She left him there.

ELIAS

She lied to me.

MIRIAM

You're so pathetic. I hear you preaching - telling these people to hope, to believe - what would they say if they knew you left a child out there on his own.

ELIAS

I'm trying to find him. I'm out there every day -

MIRIAM

I asked you to go and find him before the storm got bad - I asked you to do that one thing and you didn't do it.

ELIAS

None of us knew it was going to get this way -

MIRIAM

We've had nothing but storm after storm - what did you think it was going to be like?

ELIAS

Then why didn't you go and get him yourself?

MIRIAM doesn't answer.

ELIAS

Why Miriam? Can you answer that?

MIRIAM

Because he wouldn't come. Because me begging Jonah to come back home would only drive him away again. Is that what you want me to say? What am I supposed to do Elias? You told me to trust him.

ELIAS

It has to be his choice to come back.

MIRIAM

He's only fifteen –

(Pulling the gun out of the backpack)

And why did he have this?

ELIAS

Is it loaded?

MIRIAM

I don't know.

ELIAS takes the gun from her. He opens it.

MIRIAM

How do you know how to do that?

ELIAS

There are two bullets missing. I'm going to keep this, okay?

MIRIAM

What are you going to do with it?

ELIAS

I'll get rid of it. It's too dangerous to have in here.

He puts the gun in his jacket.

MIRIAM

Where do you go when you disappear? All these years and I've never known.

ELIAS

I took Elaine to a safe place. I'll find somewhere safe for you too.

MIRIAM

I'm not leaving until I find Jonah.

ELIAS

I'm going.

MIRIAM

Where?

ELIAS starts to go.

MIRIAM

Please don't leave me again.

He leaves.

The lights and radio noise fade.

Four EVACUEES walk slowly carrying suitcases over their heads - as if moving through deep water. They open their suitcases and pour them out - but their suitcases are empty. Instead we hear the sound of birds flying up - as if they have been released from the suitcases.

The startled EVACUEES look up.

The sounds of many birds begins to grow.

SCENE TEN

The bird sanctuary.

ELAINE sleeps on a pile of blankets.

The tree branch appears.

The BOY sits on it, his hood pulled over his face.

He holds the backpack.

Two gunshots ring out.

The tree and the boy disappear.

ELAINE wakes with a start.

ELAINE

No –

She gets her crank radio and winds it.

All she gets is static.

She puts her hands on her belly.

ELAINE

Can you hear me, little one?

I'm going to stay here.

I'll build a nest for the two of us.

Keep talking to me so I know you're there.

I'll wait for you here.

She closes her eyes as the lights fade.

CHILD'S VOICE

(Same as the radio)

I will find you.

The birds will lead me to you.

Mama, I'm coming.

The sound of birds begins to rise.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO: WATER

SCENE ONE

Many years in the future, in the belly of a huge ship. This is the ship's birdhouse; a dark, confined space, and the home of the BIRD KEEPERS.

*The sound of many birds nesting.
MUD, 8, is wrapped in a blanket and wearing her pajamas. She glares at BIRD KEEPER 3.*

BIRD KEEPER 3

Go back to bed!

MUD

Why isn't the Reverend coming? He always comes down here at night.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I told you, he's sick.

MUD

Why's he sick again?

BIRD KEEPER 3

I don't know.

MUD

Can I go see him?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Don't be stupid. Of course you can't see him. Now go to sleep.

MUD

The Reverend always tells me a story to help me fall asleep.

BIRD KEEPER 3

You want a story, read a book.

MUD

I've read all the books.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Read them again.

MUD

If I don't get a story, I can't fall asleep.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I don't know any stories. Besides, I have to help the other two clean up. The Captain's coming down here.

MUD

He is? What for?

BIRD KEEPER 3

(Realizing his mistake)

Uh - - for inspection.

MUD

But he never comes down here.

BIRD KEEPER 3

He's inspecting the birdhouse. And you have to stay out of sight.

MUD

Can I watch?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Of course you can't watch.

MUD

I promise he won't see me.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Do you know how much trouble we'd be in if he found you? Go to sleep.

MUD

No.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Go to sleep or I'll lock you in the closet with the bird food.

MUD

You're a bad babysitter.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I wouldn't have to be a babysitter if you weren't such a baby.

MUD starts to cry.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Stop crying, okay? You'll get me in trouble with the others.

MUD

The Reverend's always sick now and he's going to die and then I'll just be stuck with you and you're mean.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I'm not going to lock you in the closet. Look, you want to hear a story?

MUD stops crying.

MUD

Yes. About before the boats. Those are my favorite ones.

BIRD KEEPER 3

You've got to promise me you'll go to sleep though.

MUD

I promise.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Okay. Um ... once upon a time the world was made up of land and water and lots of people and they had cities and armies and they cut down a lot of trees and that caused all sorts of problems and um, lots of stuff happened -

MUD

This isn't a very good story.

BIRD KEEPER 3

You want me to tell it or not?

Then the world got all messed up and there were storms and disease and a lot of people died and the land started to disappear, slowly at first but then faster - faster than anybody expected. And everyone built boats, which is why we're here on this stupid ship waiting for the water to go down. The end.

MUD

That's not the end.

BIRD KEEPERS 1 and 2 enter. They've been cleaning and are covered in feathers and dirt.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Why isn't she asleep?

MUD

He's a bad storyteller.

BIRD KEEPER 1
(To BIRD KEEPER 3)

You were supposed to get her to bed. Otherwise, *you* could have cleaned.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I tried.

MUD

I want to see the Reverend.

BIRD KEEPER 3

He spoils her. Anything she wants --

BIRD KEEPER 1

The Reverend can't see anybody right now until he's out of quarantine. Now go to bed.

*From off stage "Attention!"
 The BIRD KEEPERS scramble to hide MUD.*

BIRD KEEPER 1

He's here.

BIRD KEEPER 2
(Overlapping)

Quick Mud - hide. He can't see you.

BIRD KEEPER 1

He wasn't supposed to be here yet.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Get her out of here -

*They stumble over each other trying to get into a
 straight line. MUD hides.
 The CAPTAIN enters.
 He looks them over, clearly displeased.*

CAPTAIN

Your bird house is a mess.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes Sir. We're sorry Sir -

CAPTAIN

As are your uniforms. Just because you're down here doesn't mean you don't comply with standards.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Sorry Sir -

BIRD KEEPER 1

(Overlapping)

We weren't expecting you quite so soon, Sir.

BIRD KEEPER 3

But we're honored, Sir, to have you visit our humble birdhouse, Sir.

CAPTAIN

You understand why I'm here? The urgency of the situation?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Yes Sir.

CAPTAIN

Well? Show me how this "bird program" works.

BIRD KEEPER 3 takes a tracking collar out of his pocket. It has a blinking red light on it.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Well, Sir, the birds are fitted with a tracking collar that the Scientists will be able to follow. This is a prototype. Obviously, um, the real ones will be bird-sized.

The CAPTAIN takes the collar.

CAPTAIN

And the information transmitted by these collars will be reliable? You can guarantee this?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Oh yes, Sir. Top-of-the-line technology.

BIRD KEEPER 3

The collar transmits a signal back to this boat -

CAPTAIN

A signal that other boats can track?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Um, no Sir, it's encoded. We'll be the only ones to know where the birds are.

CAPTAIN

You don't need satellites to transmit the signal?

BIRD KEEPER 2

No, Sir. That's the whole point of the bird program - it's here when the technology um...

BIRD KEEPER 1

Crashes into the ocean.

BIRD KEEPER 3

We've chosen three different birds for the first release Sir -

BIRD KEEPER 2

We've bred them for maximum distance flying capability.

BIRD KEEPER 1

There's the Bar-tailed Godwit -

BIRD KEEPER 2

He can fly 11,000 kilometers!

BIRD KEEPER 1

We've also chosen a Sooty Shearwater -

BIRD KEEPER 2

They fly up to 14,000 kilometers -

CAPTAIN

Yes, yes. But then what?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Well, then when the light stops moving on the screen, we know the bird has found land.

CAPTAIN

And if it doesn't, what - it turns around and comes back?

BIRD KEEPER 1

The birds won't come back. They won't have the strength if they don't find food -

CAPTAIN

Then how will we know the bird hasn't just died and is floating in water?

BIRD KEEPER 1

The collars will short out if they are submerged.

BIRD KEEPER 3

We feel confident Sir, given our calculations, that the birds will have a successful journey.

CAPTAIN

You have enough birds? Just in case.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Oh yes - hundreds.

BIRD KEEPER 3

And more being bred every day, Sir. Just in case.

CAPTAIN

You've had a free ride for eight years on this boat. You'd better hope your bird program works.

BIRD KEEPER 1

If it's out there, our birds will find it.

CAPTAIN

Your birds?

BIRD KEEPER 2

He meant Sir -

CAPTAIN

These birds are property of the military. Don't forget that.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And we are honored to take care of them, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Superstitious nonsense. We have the most advanced technology on the planet ...

BIRD KEEPER 1

(Under his breath)

When it works.

CAPTAIN

What's that?

BIRD KEEPER 2

It gives people hope, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Hope. Right. Just find land.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes Sir.

He exits.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Yes Sir.

MUD comes out from hiding.

MUD

You're sending the birds away?

BIRD KEEPER 3

You're supposed to be asleep.

MUD

Why didn't you tell me?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Oh Mud -

BIRD KEEPER 3

You know that's why they're on this ship.

MUD

But you said it was dangerous out there.

BIRD KEEPER 2

For people, but not for birds.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Remember how we said the satellites have started crashing?

MUD

You said the Scientists were all yelling at each other about it.

BIRD KEEPER 1

It was decided when – if - that if that started to happen, we'd send out the birds.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Think of how happy they'll be to get up into the sky.

MUD

And when they find land, we'll go and get them, right?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Right. They're going to wear special collars so we always know where they are.

MUD

You promise me they'll be okay?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Of course.

Now, we promised the Reverend we'd take good care of you until he got better and it's way past your bedtime.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Good night Mud.

MUD

Good night.

She exits.

BIRD KEEPER 3

What are we going to do if the Reverend doesn't make it? I don't know anything about raising a kid.

BIRD KEEPER 2

He'll be fine. He always comes through.

BIRD KEEPER 1

They're rationing his medication. He's only getting half doses.

BIRD KEEPER 2

They can't do that.

BIRD KEEPER 1

That's what happened with the other bird keepers.

BIRD KEEPER 2

They said it was natural causes.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Sure, they *said* that. Haven't you noticed? The Scientists and the Soldiers get the same illnesses we do, but they always get better.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Better hope we don't get sick.

BIRD KEEPER 1

If the birds don't find land, they'll kick us off the boat anyway.

BIRD KEEPER 2

No, we're going to find land soon. You shouldn't say things like that.

(Indicating MUD)

Especially with ...

BIRD KEEPER 3

The Scientists said the water's been going down. That means there's land out there.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Exactly. We have to believe.

BIRD KEEPER 3

We could be off this boat in a few weeks. Or even sooner - imagine that.

BIRD KEEPER 3 holds up the collar and they look at it. Its small red light blinks as the lights fade.

RELEASE

The sound of water hitting the sides of a large ship.

The BIRD KEEPERS stand as if they are each holding a bird on their arm.

The birds are released.

The sound of flapping wings.

They watch the birds fly away.

SCENE TWO

In the birdhouse. Night

MUD is in bed, anxious. She hums bits of the Beethoven sonata to herself.

BIRD KEEPER 2 pokes her head in.

BIRD KEEPER 2

You're still awake?

MUD

Have the birds found land yet?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Not yet.

MUD

When is the Reverend going to come and see me?

BIRD KEEPER 2

I'm sure he'll be out of quarantine soon.

MUD

Oh.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Do you want me to stay with you until you fall asleep?

MUD

Will you tell me a story?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Sure.

Hmm... let's see: once upon a time in a far away kingdom -

MUD

No tell me a true story. About before.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Why do you want to hear about that time? That world's gone.

MUD

I need to remember.

BIRD KEEPER 2

What would you remember? You were just a baby. You're lucky you didn't have to see all of that.

Has the Reverend told you the story of the Child of the New World?

MUD

That's my favorite. The Child finds the New World and everyone gets off the boats.

BIRD KEEPER 2

But the story starts before that, with the Child's mother.

MUD

It does?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Once there was a woman. She was all alone one night and a terrible storm came.

MUD

Was she scared?

BIRD KEEPER 2

She was. It was a very bad storm. But she knew that she couldn't show the storm that she was frightened, so she pretended it was nothing more than a silly bit of wind.

MUD blows like a silly bit of wind.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And that made the storm mad. Scary storms demand to be taken seriously. So the storm swept over the water and picked up as much as it could and it dumped the water all over the city where the woman lived. And her whole house filled up with water. But the woman got away.

MUD

She hid from the storm?

She blows harder.

BIRD KEEPER 2

She tried but the storm destroyed all the houses where she lived. No matter where she went, it followed her.

MUD blows harder. The faint sound of wind grows under her and begins to build.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And one night the storm caught up to her. She had nowhere else to go.

The sound of wind builds.

BIRD KEEPER 2

She cried out but no one would help her because they were too scared. And then the storm was all around her. She closed her eyes and thought, "I can't fight any more, now the storm will devour me."

A gale.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And the world around her grew dark.

MUD

Like night time?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Darker.

MUD

Like the machine room of the ship when the light's burnt out?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Even darker.

MUD

Like the bottom of the ocean?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes. Like that.

MUD

And then what happened?

The wind sound fades.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It was the scariest thing she'd ever experienced, but it didn't devour her. And in the morning she was still there. And then she felt something inside of her and she knew she was going to have a baby.

MUD

(Doubtful)

A baby?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes, a baby. It had come with the storm, and all of the rage and terror of the storm was in the baby but it was making the baby strong and brave. And the woman knew that when she had this baby, she wouldn't be alone in the world anymore. But she also knew that the world was dangerous so she decided she would make a safe place and wait there until she gave birth.

MUD

She built a nest.

BIRD KEEPER 2

You do know this story.

MUD

No, it's what birds do.

BIRD KEEPER 2

She built a nest in a safe dry place and she waited. And then the baby was born.

MUD

So she wasn't lonely any more.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And that baby was the Child of the New World.

MUD is asleep.

BIRD KEEPER 2 strokes her hair.

BIRD KEEPERS 1 and 3 enter. They gesture for BIRD KEEPER 2 to join them. They speak quietly.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We just saw the screen. It's blank. They've been flying for days and now there's nothing.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Maybe the collars fell off.

BIRD KEEPER 1

You saw those collars. They don't fall off.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They can't have died yet.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Does the Captain know?

BIRD KEEPER 1

He's already ordered more birds to be released.

BIRD KEEPER 2

No! It's too soon.

MUD

(Waking)

Too soon for what?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Nothing. Go back to sleep.

BIRD KEEPER 1

She'll figure it out when the birds start disappearing.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It was supposed to be one release a month at the most.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Ever since those satellites went down, the Captain's ass has been on the line. If our ships don't find land first, there's going to be trouble.

MUD

Are they sending off more birds?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Go to sleep. This doesn't concern you.

BIRD KEEPER 1

The ones they sent have disappeared. We've lost their signal.

BIRD KEEPER 2

What are you doing?

MUD

What happened to them?

BIRD KEEPER 2

They're sending off more to help the others look.

MUD

But did something happen to the first birds?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Yes. But we don't know what.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Great, now she's never going to sleep.

BIRD KEEPER 1

What do you think it's going to be like if those birds find land? You think we're just going to settle nicely wherever the boat stops? It'll be chaos - it'll be worse than when we got on. We'll be lucky we don't get shot the moment we walk off the boat.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Who's going to shoot us? We'll be the first ones there.

BIRD KEEPER 1

And what happens when the other boats arrive? Or when they find out that we've got seeds? You think they're going to ask nicely for us to share?

BIRD KEEPER 2

I hate it when you talk like this.

BIRD KEEPER 3

We've got a military. We'll be protected.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Our military aren't the only ones out there with an arsenal. Besides, they'll be trying to protect the seeds and the Scientists. They won't need us then.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They wouldn't.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Stop it, you're scaring her.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Anything's better than spending another year on this damned boat.

BIRD KEEPER 1

You don't know that.

BIRD KEEPER 3

So, what, now you want to stay on the boat?

BIRD KEEPER 1
Or course not.

BIRD KEEPER 2
This isn't the time.

MUD
Please don't fight.

BIRD KEEPER 1
She needs to know this.

BIRD KEEPER 2
She's just a child.

BIRD KEEPER 1
Keeping her ignorant isn't the way to protect her.

BIRD KEEPER 2
I think we should respect the Reverend's wishes.

MUD
(Desperate)
Stop!

The BIRD KEEPERS glare at each other.

MUD
I have dreams about when we got on the boat.

BIRD KEEPER 3
That's impossible - you were just a baby.

MUD
But I saw it. The birds flying around and the people in the water -
(To BIRD KEEPER 2)
Were you scared?

BIRD KEEPER 2
No – it was exciting. The boats were from all over the world. When they passed each other people would fill the decks and wave.

BIRD KEEPER 1
And what about the ones who didn't get on a boat?

MUD

What do you mean?

The BIRD KEEPERS look at each other.

MUD

Who didn't get on the boats?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Things were very complicated back then. You wouldn't understand.

BIRD KEEPER 1

There were more than six billion people when the flooding began.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Didn't you hear what I just said?

BIRD KEEPER 3

She's old enough. The Reverend babies her too much anyway.

BIRD KEEPER 1

If there were six billion people, and each boat held about 3000 people, how many boats would they need?

MUD

Um... how many zeroes in a billion?

BIRD KEEPER 1

They would have needed over two million boats. That's if everyone was going to get on.

MUD

Wow...

BIRD KEEPER 1

But there weren't that many. There weren't nearly enough.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Lots of people had their own boats. And those weren't included in official counts.

BIRD KEEPER 1

But what nobody could predict was how long the world would be covered with water. And now a lot of the boats have run out of food so they're attacking other boats.

BIRD KEEPER 2

You know what the Reverend said about fear mongering –

BIRD KEEPER 1

I know what he said but I can think for myself and so should you. You've seen those burnt out wrecks – like floating graveyards.

MUD

Are they going to attack us?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Of course not - we're protected.

(To BIRD KEEPER 1)

We have a chance to start over now. If you bring all that into the New World those problems will continue.

BIRD KEEPER 1

The "New World".

MUD

But it is. When the water goes it will be the New World.

BIRD KEEPER 1

That's just a fancy name for the same old problems.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Don't listen to him. Remember what the Reverend says - we're the chosen ones.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We're not chosen.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Then why are we here?

BIRD KEEPER 1

We're just lucky.

MUD

Why would he say it if it wasn't true?

BIRD KEEPER 2

If it helps people, why not call it that.

(To MUD)

It will be a new world for you.

MUD

For me?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes. Don't forget that.

MUD

In the New World, I'm going to fly. The birds are going to teach me.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Sure you will.

MUD

They talk to me. They tell me things.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Come on, back into bed for you.

MUD returns to her cot. She begins to hum the Beethoven sonata.

BIRD KEEPER 2

That's pretty. Where did you learn that?

MUD

It was in my head after my dream. I have to keep singing it so I don't forget.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I know that song... I can't place it ...

MUD sleeps. The BIRD KEEPERS exit.

RELEASE

Another release of birds.

Sound of water hitting a boat.

Sound of wings flapping.

Sound of wind.

Silence.

SCENE THREE

In the ship's birdhouse.

MUD holds seeds out to the birds.

BIRD KEEPER 1 enters hiding a large book behind his back.

MUD

Do you think it hurt him?

BIRD KEEPER 1

No. The doctor gave the Reverend a special medicine so it didn't hurt. It was just like he went to sleep.

MUD

I wonder if there's land in Heaven.

BIRD KEEPER 1

I think there must be. The Reverend used to talk about the gardens he was going to plant when we landed. I bet that's what he's doing right now - digging himself a garden as big as this boat. Wait till you feel earth. There's nothing that feels like that.

MUD

Is that why he called me Mud? Because he liked gardens?

BIRD KEEPER 1

We called you Mud because that's what you were covered in when you came on the ship. You were the dirtiest baby I'd ever seen. I guess you're getting too old for that name now.

MUD

I like it. Because there isn't any mud now. So I'm the only one. What's that book?

BIRD KEEPER 1

I thought it might help you feel better, but it's a secret.

MUD

(Reaching for it)

Ohh - can I see?

BIRD KEEPER 1

First, you have to promise you won't tell anybody else that I gave this to you.

MUD

I promise.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We're not supposed to think of the world this way anymore. It'll make things complicated when we find land.

(Giving her the book)

This is called an atlas. It's pictures of what the world looked like before the flood.

She opens it.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Sometimes when I'm feeling sad it makes me feel better to look at it.

MUD

It's all different colours.

BIRD KEEPER 1

They put the different countries in different colours so you could tell where the borders were.

MUD

I like this pink country. Spain... Yemen... Aus-Aust-ral-lia...?

BIRD KEEPER 1

I went to Australia once, with my parents. It was the first time I'd ever been in an airplane...

(Turning back to the atlas)

You see the blue lines? Those are the rivers. And the red lines are roads.

MUD

There's so much land. What are the orange places?

BIRD KEEPER 1

That's where a city was. This is an old atlas. The cities got a lot bigger than they are in here.

MUD

Where are we now?

BIRD KEEPER 1

I don't know. Pick a place.

MUD

Any place?

(She opens a page and points)

Pra-goo.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Prague. That was an old city in a country called the Czech Republic. There were buildings in the old part that looked like fancy cakes. Imagine cakes that are four stories tall.

MUD

I want to go there.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We could be floating over Prague right now.

MUD

Really?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Sure. Why not.

MUD

Where was I born?

BIRD KEEPER 1

(Taking the atlas)

I'm not sure exactly, but the bird sanctuary was here so probably somewhere near that.

He gives the atlas back to her. She puts her face very close to the page.

BIRD KEEPER 1

What are you doing?

MUD

Trying to see my house.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Atlases don't show things like that.

MUD

Oh.

He takes out a blue handkerchief and drags it across the page.

BIRD KEEPER 1

That's how the water moved.

MUD

Over the orange and pink parts?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Over all the parts. Especially the cities because most of them were by the water.

MUD

How come they didn't build enough boats?

BIRD KEEPER 1

It cost a lot of money to build a boat and a lot of countries were poor. And there was a lot of fighting about who should be allowed to be on the boats. But mostly it was because people didn't think the water would get as high as it did.

MUD

Why wouldn't they believe that?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Well, it had never happened before. And it's hard for people to believe something can happen if they can't see it. I know you can't remember because you were just a baby, but it was a scary time. And when things started to get really bad it was very confusing, and frightening, and people didn't act the way they normally would have. Even good people.

MUD nods. A moment.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Mud, we don't know what happened to your mother.

MUD

She got on a different boat.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We don't know that. I'm not saying she didn't, but we don't know for sure.

MUD

Then where is she?

BIRD KEEPER 1

I don't know.

She starts tearing through the pages.

MUD

Where is she?

BIRD KEEPER 1

That book isn't going to tell you.

MUD

Why didn't you tell me before?

BIRD KEEPER 1

You were too young.

MUD

But you should have told me.

BIRD KEEPER 1

What good would it have done?

MUD

She's out there and we didn't help her and -

BIRD KEEPER 1

Getting upset isn't going to change anything.

MUD

How am I going to find her when we get off this boat? How am I going to find her?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Be a big girl now.

MUD

No. You've known. You've known this whole time.

BIRD KEEPER 1

We don't know anything. When the Reverend brought you to us -

MUD

He knew. He knew and he didn't tell me and now he's dead and-

BIRD KEEPER 1

Calm down. You'll upset the birds.

MUD

I don't care about the stupid birds. I want my mother.

BIRD KEEPER 1
(Harsh)

Be quiet.

Your mother gave you to the Reverend to sneak onto this boat because she knew this boat would be protected. You should be grateful.

MUD

But why did she give me away?

BIRD KEEPER 1

She never would have been allowed on here and if she kept you, you wouldn't be here either. Crying and getting upset isn't going to change what has already happened. Do you understand? I'm telling you because I think you should know. Things are changing.

MUD nods.

BIRD KEEPER 1

None of our families could get on here. I had a little girl but I couldn't bring her.

MUD

Why didn't you go with your daughter?

BIRD KEEPER 1

I believed, at the time, that what we were doing was important. The birds can't take care of themselves. So my wife and daughter got on a smaller boat - it was all we could afford.

And ... how could we have known it would take this long for the water to go down.

My daughter would have been just a little older than you.

MUD

What's her name?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Grace.

MUD

I think she's still out there.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Do you?

MUD

Yes. And so's my mother.

BIRD KEEPER 1 is silent.

MUD

I didn't mean what I said about the birds.

BIRD KEEPER 1

I know.

MUD

They know things. They know things we don't know. I'm sure of it. You have to tell the Captain to stop releasing them so fast. The birdhouse is so quiet now. That's why they're not laying eggs any more - they don't want to have to leave their babies. They told me.

BIRD KEEPER 1

You're getting too old to be imagining that the birds are talking.

MUD

I'm not imagining it. I can understand them.

BIRD KEEPER 1 starts to go.

MUD

Are you mad because I got on the boat instead of your daughter?

BIRD KEEPER 1

The Reverend kept you hidden under his coat until we'd pulled away from the dock. None of us knew about you, but then you cried. It was a shock - for all of us. But he told us that you had waited a long time to be born. Most babies wouldn't have survived what your mother went through while she carried you, but you did. When you were finally born, he said, you were covered in pieces of eggshell.

MUD

Eggshell?

BIRD KEEPER 1

Blue eggshell. That's what he told us.

MUD

Oh.

But are you mad?

BIRD KEEPER 1

No. In a way, I'm grateful.

He exits.

MUD opens the atlas.

MUD

Where are you? Are you looking for me?

She drags her hand across the page.

MUD

This is how the water moved...

The sound of water rises.

SCENE FOUR

The deck of the boat.

MUD is running away. She holds the atlas and pulls on a rope, trying to lower a life raft.

The CAPTAIN enters and sees her. Her back is to him. He pulls out his gun.

CAPTAIN

You there - halt.

MUD freezes.

CAPTAIN

Turn around.

MUD doesn't move.

CAPTAIN

Turn around and state your name or I shoot.

He cocks his gun.

MUD turns slowly, trying not to cry.

CAPTAIN

What the - who are you?

He grabs her, almost lifting her off the ground.

CAPTAIN

Whose kid are you? How did you get on this boat? Answer me.

MUD

I - I -

CAPTAIN

You speak English?

MUD nods.

CAPTAIN

Who brought you here?

MUD

I live here.

CAPTAIN

No you don't. No one comes on this boat who hasn't been approved by me.

MUD

With the birds.

CAPTAIN

You one of those damned bird keeper's kids? There's no kids allowed on this boat.

MUD

Please. They don't know I'm up here. They'll be so mad.

CAPTAIN

What were you doing with this lifeboat?

MUD

I'm leaving.

CAPTAIN

Leaving? Where do you think you're going?

MUD

To where the orange cities were.

CAPTAIN

Show me what's in your pockets.

MUD

I've got to find her.

CAPTAIN

Drop everything you're carrying and empty your pockets.

MUD

I don't understand.

The CAPTAIN starts pulling out her pockets.

CAPTAIN

Where you hiding them?

MUD

I don't have anything -

CAPTAIN

Seeds - show me where you're hiding them.

MUD

Please Sir -

He pulls seeds out of her pocket.

CAPTAIN

What's this then?

MUD

It's birdseed. I was feeding the birds this morning. It's my job -

CAPTAIN

Who sent you here?

He grabs her atlas and starts tearing through it.

MUD

NO!!

CAPTAIN

Why do you have this? Are you spying on us?

MUD

That's mine - you can't have it - it's mine it's -

*She grabs for it but the CAPTAIN knocks her away.
He takes out his gun and points it at her.*

BIRD KEEPER 3 enters and runs in front of MUD.

BIRD KEEPER 3

No – please – she's with us -

CAPTAIN

What the hell is going on down there?

BIRD KEEPER 3

I'm sorry Sir.

CAPTAIN

This is your kid?

BIRD KEEPER 3

No Sir. She was brought to us.

CAPTAIN

When? Who brought her?

BIRD KEEPER 3

The Reverend – when we got on. We had no choice -

CAPTAIN

You had no choice? To disobey orders? Eight years you've been stealing food for her.

BIRD KEEPER 3

No Sir. She eats from our rations – nothing extra.

CAPTAIN

I'm calling one of my men to remove her immediately -

BIRD KEEPER 3

No! Please - I promise you'll never have to see her again. Please, Sir.

CAPTAIN

There are men who have given their lives protecting this boat. Do you understand that?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Yes Sir.

CAPTAIN

If you want to survive when we find land, you protect what's on here. Do the Scientists know about her?

BIRD KEEPER 3

No Sir. No one does Sir.

CAPTAIN

If she's stealing seeds, I'm holding you responsible.

BIRD KEEPER 3

She isn't Sir. I swear.

CAPTAIN

(Holding out the birdseed)

Then what's this?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Those are sunflower seeds. It's, um, bird seed, Sir.

CAPTAIN

I'm going to take this to the lab. If it's theirs -

BIRD KEEPER 3

I promise you it isn't Sir. She doesn't know anything about the seeds.

CAPTAIN

This kid doesn't exist. Is that clear?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Yes Sir.

CAPTAIN

If I see her again...

BIRD KEEPER 3

You won't, Sir.

*The CAPTAIN turns and exits, taking the atlas.
BIRD KEEPER 3 grabs MUD.*

BIRD KEEPER 3

What the hell were you doing? The three of us have been tearing apart the birdhouse trying to find you.

MUD

I'm sorry -

BIRD KEEPER 3

You're lucky I found you when I did. He could have killed you. Or kicked us all off the boat.

MUD

Good! I hate this stupid boat.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Yeah, well so do I, but it's a hell of a lot better than being out there. Why do you think the military protects us?

MUD

For the birds.

BIRD KEEPER 3

No stupid - you ever see any Scientists in the birdhouse? It's seeds. There are seeds on this boat worth more than your life.

MUD

I don't understand. Everybody keeps talking about seeds.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Think about it: for food. You think we're going to walk off the boat and find a grocery store?

MUD

What's a grocery store?

BIRD KEEPER 3

They're special seeds for growing food wherever we find land. And they're worth enough for the military to protect them. You do something like this again and he'll kick us all off and it'll be your fault.

MUD

I have to find her.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Find who?

MUD

My mother.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Is this one of those stories the Reverend told you?

MUD

It's not a story. I saw it – the people jumping into the water and the soldiers shooting at them and making the water red and -

BIRD KEEPER 3

Who told you about that?

MUD

I *saw* it – I told you -

BIRD KEEPER 3

Just stop, okay?

MUD

I can feel her. I talk to her.

BIRD KEEPER 3

It's been eight years, Mud.

Look, if your mother is out there - you have to believe me - you're safer with us.
We're going to find land soon and when we do -

MUD

But how do you know that?

BIRD KEEPER 3

I don't know. But we have to - eventually we have to. It's out there. It could be so close.

Come on, let's go back down.

MUD

Do you know about the eggshells?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Eggshells?

MUD

From when I was born...?

Never mind. It's just a story too I guess.

BIRD KEEPER 3 starts to lead her off.

MUD

He took my atlas.

BIRD KEEPER 3

You weren't supposed to have it in the first place.

MUD

Those pictures were real.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Come on. Before someone else sees you.

They exit.

SCENE FIVE

The Captain's quarters.

The CAPTAIN is alone. There is knock at the door.

CAPTAIN

Enter!

The three BIRD KEEPERS enter tentatively. They stand in silence a moment.

CAPTAIN

Well?

BIRD KEEPER 3

It's about the birds, Sir.

CAPTAIN

What about them?

BIRD KEEPER 2

We're running out, Sir.

CAPTAIN

You told me that wouldn't happen.

BIRD KEEPER 3

We know, Sir.

CAPTAIN

You assured me.

BIRD KEEPER 3

It seems there've been some problems with breeding.

CAPTAIN

Well, it seems you have quite a problem then.

BIRD KEEPER 1

If we could hold off, there are some young ones that just need to mature.

CAPTAIN

You don't "hold off" when a command has been given.

BIRD KEEPER 1

But it isn't reasonable -

CAPTAIN

Reasonable?! Do you see those boats out there?

He hands BIRD KEEPER 3 a pair a binoculars.

CAPTAIN

How many do you see?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Forty, maybe? Fifty? Where'd they all come from?

CAPTAIN

There's over a hundred boats out there and that's only in one direction. We're surrounded. Ever since we started releasing the damned birds. Like a pack of jackals.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I don't recognize the flags.

CAPTAIN

Because they aren't countries. They're militias, gangs - whoever's got the guns. You idiots spend all your time down there in that hole - you've got no sense of reality. As long as we hold the birds no one touches us. We stop releasing and they attack.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Perhaps we could negotiate?

CAPTAIN

You make me sick. You and those assholes in white coats. We've spent eight years protecting you - eight years my men have been out in that mess sacrificing their lives while you've had a free ride. Now you can't even find one pathetic patch of ground. We release on schedule.

BIRD KEEPER 2

But -

CAPTAIN

Dismissed.

BIRD KEEPER 1 exits.

CAPTAIN

If you're out of birds find something else.

*He hands BIRD KEEPER 2 the prototype collar
from earlier and exits.*

BIRDKEEPERS 2 and 3 look at the collar.

BIRD KEEPER 3

She'll never do it. She's just a kid.

BIRD KEEPER 2

She'll do it. She believes the story. She'll do it.

BIRD KEEPER 3 exits.

BIRD KEEPER 2 kneels to begin the prayer.

SCENE SIX

BIRD KEEPER 2 alone.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Child of water.
Child of earth.
Child of mud.

No one knows where the Child of the New World began.
Some say she came from the rain that cracked the earth.
Some say she was forged from the violence of the Old World.
And some say she was created from the longing of her mother, sculpted cell by cell out of the minutes of her waiting days.

The silhouette of a pregnant woman appears.

BIRD KEEPER 2 (*CONT'D*)

From the belly of her mother, the Child was passed into the belly of a giant; an iron mother floating in cold, dark water.
Until there comes a time when the Child must leave that too.
She must pass through the water to find earth again.
New earth.
As it was in the beginning.

(She holds up the tracking collar)

She must pass through the water... to find earth again.

MUD steps forward.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It won't hurt, I promise.

MUD

But - ?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Mud, you can trust me.

She puts the collar around MUD's neck. It locks.

MUD

It's cold.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It won't come off. It's for your protection. Just like with the birds. That's how we'll track you.

MUD

But I don't know how to fly yet.

BIRD KEEPER 2

That's okay. You're going to get a boat.

MUD

My very own boat?

BIRD KEEPER 2

And the Scientists will be able to watch you on the screen the same way they watched the birds.

MUD

I want you to watch me. I want to know you're watching me.

BIRD KEEPER 2

We'll always know where you are. You remember the story about the Child of the New World?

MUD

Her father was the storm. And her mother was an old woman.

BIRD KEEPER 2

But there's another part of the story that I didn't tell you. Some say that after the baby was born, her mother became a great bird. She spread her wings and lifted into the sky.

MUD

Why didn't she stay with her baby?

BIRD KEEPER 2

She became a bird so she could live in the sky and watch over her daughter. It was you.

MUD

Me?

BIRD KEEPER 2

That's why you have to do this. So you can find the new world.

MUD

My mother's in the sky?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes. And she's waiting for you.

BIRD KEEPER 3 enters. He holds the violin.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They want us up on deck.

MUD

The child was me!

BIRD KEEPER 2

We'll be watching you from here and your mother will watch you from the sky.
You'll never be alone.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Mud, I have something for you. It's from your mother.

MUD

From my mother?

BIRD KEEPER 3

It's a violin. When the Reverend brought you to us, he brought this too. I took it.
I liked to hold it.

MUD

What does it do?

BIRD KEEPER 3

It makes music.

BIRD KEEPER 3 helps MUD hold the violin. She pulls the bow across the strings. A long note comes out.

MUD

It's like a bird!

BIRD KEEPER 3

Take it with you. It was meant to be yours.

MUD

And I can call to my mother with it.

(Throwing her arms around BIRD KEEPER 3)

Thank you!

BIRD KEEPER 1 rushes in.

BIRD KEEPER 1

They just told me -

(Seeing MUD)

Take that thing off her.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It doesn't come off.

BIRD KEEPER 1

You'll go this far to obey orders?

BIRD KEEPER 3

We have no choice. You heard what the Captain said.

BIRD KEEPER 1

(To MUD)

I won't let them do this to you.

MUD

The Child of the New World is me!

BIRD KEEPER 1

The Reverend was our friend. We promised we'd take care of her.

BIRD KEEPER 2

And we did. But this is what is supposed to happen.

BIRD KEEPER 1

(To MUD)

Run - go - get out of here.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Where's she going to go? He's got soldiers all over the ship.

MUD

I want to go.

BIRD KEEPER 1

No, you don't.

(To the other BIRD KEEPERS)

What kind of lies did you tell her?

MUD

They're not lies -

BIRD KEEPER 3

Do you want us all to starve? Or be attacked?

BIRD KEEPER 1

How can you do this? She's like our own child.

BIRD KEEPER 3

It's not about her. It's about surviving a little longer. That's all we need - just a little bit longer and then this will be over.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Send the baby birds.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They'll drown the moment they fly off the ship. The collars will pull them down.

*BIRD KEEPER 1 hits BIRD KEEPER 3. He falls -
BIRD KEEPER 1 keeps hitting him. MUD screams.*

BIRD KEEPER 1

What did you tell them? How do they even know about her? You selfish little -

MUD

Stop it -

BIRD KEEPER 1

They should send you - -

MUD

Please don't fight.

BIRD KEEPER 2

It has to be her. She's the one to find land. We won't see it.

MUD

I will. I'll find land.

BIRD KEEPER 1

There is no land out there.

BIRD KEEPER 2

Yes there is.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Just garbage. And people who hate us -

BIRD KEEPER 2

How dare you say that.

BIRD KEEPER 1

What do you think keeps happening to the birds? They're shooting them for food and then telling us to release more.

BIRD KEEPER 2

If they wanted to kill the birds for food, they'd have done it long ago. They're waiting just like we are - they believe it too.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They'll kill us all if we don't release something.

BIRD KEEPER 2

(To MUD)

You have to believe.

MUD

I do - I believe it.

BIRD KEEPER 1

I don't have to believe anything.

MUD

I'll be able to find it – I know I will.

BIRD KEEPER 1

How?

MUD

Because birds can see land.

BIRD KEEPER 1

But you're not a bird.

MUD

Yes I am. Just like my mother.

BIRD KEEPER 1

Your mother wasn't a bird. She was just a woman who got left behind.

MUD

NO.

The CAPTAIN enters.

CAPTAIN

What's the problem in here? I told you to have her on deck at 0600 hours.

BIRD KEEPER 3

I'm sorry Sir.

CAPTAIN

Stand at attention when in the presence of a superior.

The BIRD KEEPERS stand at attention. MUD approaches the CAPTAIN.

MUD

Sir? I'm ready.

CAPTAIN

Good. You're the only one down here with half a brain.

(Then, gently)

That collar looks tight.

MUD

It's okay. Thank you, Sir. May I say goodbye to them?

CAPTAIN

Make it quick.

BIRD KEEPER 3

(To MUD)

We'll be watching you.

MUD

I know.

She hugs BIRD KEEPER 3.

MUD

(To BIRD KEEPER 2)

Thank you for telling me the rest of the story.

She hugs BIRD KEEPER 2.

MUD

(To BIRD KEEPER 1)

I'll look for your daughter. You can find her again.

BIRD KEEPER 1

There's nothing out there.

MUD

No - there's land. And I'm going to find it.

She hugs BIRD KEEPER 1.

BIRD KEEPER 1

But who's going to protect you?

MUD

You will. You all will.

MUD exits.

The CAPTAIN starts to follow then turns.

CAPTAIN

Some of my men have volunteered to escort her past the other boats.
I'm sorry. That's all I can do.

He exits.

The BIRD KEEPERS stand, unable to do anything.

Silence.

BIRD KEEPER 1

What have we done?
She was our child and we've let them - -

They don't look at each other.

BIRD KEEPER 3

They'll shoot us.

BIRD KEEPER 2

No - it will come true. We have to believe.

BIRD KEEPER 1

You're willing to risk her life to find out?

BIRD KEEPER 2

Everything that's happened. Everyone we've lost.
All the nights listening to the boat, to the noise of the birds and I've waited. So
many times I wanted to... to end.
But I believed. No matter what I ... -

BIRD KEEPER 2 (*CONT'D*)

It has to be true.
This can't be all there is.
It has to be true.

BIRD KEEPER 1 runs out after MUD.

BIRD KEEPER 3
(*Starting to go after him*)

They'll kill him –

BIRD KEEPER 2

No – let him go –

*Sounds of shouting.
A gunshot.*

Lights shift into:

SCENE SEVEN

The abandoned bird sanctuary, eight years earlier.

The silhouette of the tree branch appears. The child is gone. ELAINE holds her baby.

ELAINE
(To the baby)

Once there was a woman who lived in a big house in a big city.
And then the world began to change.
Just like she knew it would. The ice had been telling her for years.
And she lost everything.
A terrible storm came and filled her world with water.
The storm swirled around her. She cried out but no one would help her and she thought she was going to die.
And out of the darkness, she heard a voice – a child’s voice.
And she waited and waited and waited until finally that child came to her.
And she gave birth to a daughter.

You’re going to have to be so much braver than I was. You’ll be a child of a new world.

ELIAS enters. He carries a BIRD KEEPER’s uniform.

ELIAS
Elaine, you have to get out of here now.
(Seeing the baby)

What is this? Who is this?

ELAINE
You came back. I knew you would.

ELIAS
You have a baby.

ELAINE
She was born last week.

Red siren lights move across the space.

ELIAS
There are soldiers coming - they’ll arrest you if they find you here.

ELAINE
But where do we go?

ELIAS

We're going to get on a boat.

ELAINE

A boat?

ELIAS

I'm going to sneak you on but it's a military ship - the security is tight. We'll say you're a Bird Keeper.

ELAINE

No, I'll hide – I'll hide in the woods until they're gone.

ELIAS

There's nowhere to hide.

ELAINE

It's too dangerous.

ELIAS

Don't you understand? The only way to survive is to be on a boat.
(Handing her the uniform)

Put this on. Hurry.

ELAINE

Will you hold her?

She gives the baby to ELIAS and starts to struggle with the uniform.

A SOLDIER enters, his face masked.

SOLDIER

You there –

ELAINE

Cover her with your coat.

ELIAS hides the baby.

SOLDIER

You can't be here. This is government property.

ELIAS

She's with me. She's part of the bird program.

SOLDIER
(To ELAINE)

Show me your papers.

ELAINE

Papers?

SOLDIER

That's what I thought. Get moving Reverend or they won't wait for you.

ELIAS

She doesn't have her paperwork but I can promise you -

SOLDIER

NOW. This compound was evacuated hours ago.

ELIAS

Elaine?

ELAINE

Take her with you.

She gets the violin and gives it to ELIAS.

ELAINE *(CONT'D)*

And when she gets old enough, give her this.

The SOLDIER pushes her with his rifle. She falls.

ELIAS

Don't do that to her -

ELAINE

If she asks about her mother, tell her a story.

SOLDIER

Come on.

ELAINE
(To ELIAS)

Go - now. GO.

ELIAS exits with the baby hidden in his coat.

ELAINE

Why are you doing this? I haven't done anything wrong.

SOLDIER

I doesn't matter what you've done. You just can't be here.

ELAINE

Then where do I go?

SOLDIER

Walk towards the water.

ELAINE

How will I know which way to go?

SOLDIER

Follow the crowd.

The SOLDIER pushes ELAINE off.

The world floods.

SCENE EIGHT

The ship's birdhouse.

*BIRD KEEPERS 2 and 3 sit, lost.
The CAPTAIN enters with the atlas. He looks
shaken.
The BIRD KEEPERS struggle to stand.*

CAPTAIN

Who was she?

BIRD KEEPER 3

Sir?

CAPTAIN

I'm not a cruel man. An order is given and it must be - it must be respected. If it isn't, all that's left is chaos.

BIRD KEEPER 3

Sir? Are you alright?

CAPTAIN

She was very kind, wasn't she.

She reminded me of children I knew a long time ago.

I'm not a cruel man.

I gave her the atlas. I thought it would help her feel less frightened. But she wouldn't take it. She just kissed it and gave it back to me.

And after she got in the boat, I opened it.

All the pages were wet - they were soaking wet. And the ink had run so you couldn't make out what any of the maps had been.

Except for one.

In the middle of the book there is one page.

Almost all blue except for a spot of green in the middle. I've never seen it before.

I watched her until I couldn't see her anymore.

And then I heard shouting - the Scientists were shouting.

They were all gathered around the screen. Another red light has suddenly appeared - the signal is faint but it's there. One of the birds released before is still out there.

BIRD KEEPER 2

But that's -

BIRD KEEPER 3

It's been flying for weeks - what's it living on?

CAPTAIN

It's not flying. The signal is still. It's found land.

The lights shift.

SCENE NINE

MUD floats on open water. The red light on her collar blinks.

She holds the violin.

She plays one note.

Silence.

She plays the note again.

Silence.

Then, very faintly, a few notes from the sonata are heard.

MUD

I will find you on an island of birds.

You will be sitting high above the water on a throne made of rock. The birds will rest on your arms and shoulders. They'll bring you food from all over the island.

The birds will lead me to you. You'll hold out your arms and I will rush into them.

And we'll be safe in our own world.

Mama – I'm coming.

MUD spreads her arms wide.

Behind her appears the silhouette of the woman.

She opens her arms to reveal immense wings.

The sound of a thousand birds flying overhead.

End of Play.