

STARLIGHT

by
Gina R. Tracy

STARLIGHT

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STARLIGHT

*for
Michael Ryan
and
Christopher*

STARLIGHT

STARLIGHT was originally performed as a Benefit Staged Reading for Project Save Our Surf at the New Vic Theatre in Santa Barbara, CA directed by Jenny Sullivan and featuring the following ensemble:

Young Michelle/Michelle.....Joanna Strapp
Young Raphael/Radio Announcer....Gregory Harrison
Young Gabrielle/Old Crone.....Amanda McBroom
Mother.....Tanna Frederick
Father.....Jeffrey Kober

STARLIGHT received its New York City premiere in a Staged Reading for Opening Day of ClimateWeekNYC 2021 along with its prequel, *1969*, and sequel, *permafrost* at Crystal Field's Theater for the New City featuring the following cast:

Young Michelle/Michelle.....Ashley McLeod
Young Raphael/Radio Announcer....Vincent Ticali
Young Gabrielle/Old Crone.....Mary Tierney
Mother.....Alison Fraser
Father.....Michael Marotta

STARLIGHT was chosen for the 25th Annual Playwrights' Festival at Fullerton and was a semi-finalist for the Garry Marshall Theatre New Works Festival 2021.

CAST: 3 Women, 2 Men, 3 Children (may be cast from adults)

YOUNG MICHELLE	Girl 5-7
YOUNG RAPHAEL	Boy 5-7
YOUNG GABRIELLE	Girl 5-7
MOTHER/YOUNG MOTHER	Factory Worker/15 Years Earlier
RADIO ANNOUNCER	Man 40s
FATHER	Lobster Fisherman
MICHELLE	College Student early 20s
OLD CRONE	Ancient Woman

PLACE: A shack on a rocky beach and the local radio station in a small township.

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ACT I
SCENE 1

Late morning at the beach. Voices of children laughing and enjoying the summer are heard, along with the sound of intermittent surf crashing on the rocky beach, seagulls flying overhead, and an occasional airplane. An idyllic hot summer's day.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Over here. Look!

YOUNG RAPHAEL. A horseshoe crab. Michelle found a horseshoe crab.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Let me see. It's a turtle. A baby turtle.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Look at his eyes. It's not a turtle.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What eyes? Let me see. Let me see, I said.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Put him down. Maybe we can watch him swim. He's not swimming, is he?

YOUNG MICHELLE. The water is warm. That's why.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Look out, the seagull is coming towards us.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Duck! Mama, Mama... A jellyfish!

YOUNG MICHELLE. Get the bucket. The big yellow bucket.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. A shell. I found a shell. Look, I found a shell.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Your shovel is in the water. It's floating away.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. That's not mine.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. It is. Look, it's going into the ocean.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. It's not mine. Mine is yellow.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Oh, no. It's going into the sea. Come back... come back.

SCENE 2

The kitchen of a fishing shack just before nightfall. Whistling can be heard offstage.

MOTHER. Here, boy... here's your fresh water. (*MOTHER enters the kitchen and sets the table for three with paper plates and cups.*) What did I do with those

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napkins? Macs, have you seen those napkins? Come on... use your special intuition and help me. Bark or something Come on, be a good boy! Scratch once for left and twice for right. Once left... okay? Twice for right. Macs, help an old lady with the important task of setting the table. Come on. I work all day to put food on the table. I'm tired. Once for left, twice for right. Help your mother! (*She turns on an old portable radio, switching channels until she lands on a local weather report.*)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. Well folks, ol' Mother Nature has providing a clean and clear view of the skies all day long. Not a cloud in the sky. I bet you star peepers will get quite a show tonight, yessiree! Quite an extraordinary show. Rave reviews comin' right here. (*FATHER enters.*)

FATHER. Quite a catch here, Ma. Must be my lucky day. Just proves the early bird catches the worm. Early to bed, early to rise, make a man wealthy and wise...

MOTHER. Healthy, wealthy and wise... You old fool, give me a kiss. (*He kisses her, then addresses Macs.*)

FATHER. You want a smooch, you old pooch? Here, pucker up. I've got the catch of my life, boy! One in a million. Close your eyes and you'll hear the most wonderful sounds of the planets in the distance, and the singing of the creatures of the sea in homage to this here lady, this queen.

MOTHER. What are you raving about? I can't find the napkins. Thought I'd draw you a bath, turn down the sheets, gaze at the stars, and dream a little. You didn't forget our wedding anniversary, did ya?

FATHER. Pucker up, Macs, I'm rich. Put your lips together, boy.

MOTHER. The sea gonna make you rich, you silly sweet fool? You dreaming again?

FATHER. Yes, Ma... Look what I hauled in. (*He sets down a bag of flotsam.*)

MOTHER. Garbage? Put that trash on my clean floor?

FATHER. One man's trash is another man's treasure. Yessiree. Pucker up, give me a kiss, Ma.

MOTHER. Hot dogs and beans okay?

FATHER

We're celebrating here, Ma. Pour me a beer. A whole beer.

MOTHER. A beer? I've been meaning to tell you... something important.

FATHER. A kiss, then I'll listen. (*She gives him a kiss.*)

FATHER. Perfect. I'm all set. I'm all ears. I'm all ears. Well?

MOTHER. The plant might close.

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FATHER. Might close?

MOTHER. Leaving town. Some city man says we've been dumping our waste into the river all these years.

FATHER. Well sure they have. You've seen my catches. Dwindling to shit. That plant worked you to death anyway. Let 'em leave.

MOTHER. Let 'em leave? Listen to you, you old fool, we need that job. I married you when you had nothing but your good looks and a dream. A dream of getting up early, coming home late... Thirty years of struggling till next season, next year.

Next year and next year. Thirty years is a long time. Let 'em leave? Are you crazy?

FATHER. You sorry you married me, Ma?

MOTHER. I'm sorry we raised our baby on spit and luck. Always wondering where the food will come from, wondering when the rug will finally be pulled out. I've lost my little girl to worry and fear. I've earned these gray hairs, just like you have. That plant has been a life saver for us. What would we have done without it? We need that factory.

FATHER. I think we've had a great life together.

It's not any easier for anyone else. Every man worries about his family. You girls don't own the rights to worry. I've done the best I know how, haven't I? You love me, Ma?

MOTHER. For richer or poorer, in sickness and health. I just been dreaming about the 'richer' part.

FATHER. We've got a good girl, Ma. We're lucky to have her.

MOTHER. She's taking after you. Got your dreams. Life ain't good to dreamers. Dreamers got to dream. Can't survive on dreams.

FATHER. Got your good looks, Ma. Got your brains. She'll be all right.

MOTHER. All right isn't good enough when times get tough. Good enough ain't good enough.

FATHER. Times is always tough, Ma. She'll be all right. She's got special gifts. She's got a sixth sense – intuition. Got a bright future. She is the future, Ma. Gotta trust her.

MOTHER. Is she gonna settle down? She gonna put food on the table for her children, our grandchildren? Is she? She gonna look up at the stars one night and wonder who's watching her? When we're gone, she gonna survive? Is she gonna take Macs and join the circus? Fly big planes? Dig tunnels? Be a lobsterman? Work

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in a plant somewhere in the world? Is she gonna have a home? I try to connect the dots up in that sky and I can't quite do it. Can't connect the dots.

FATHER. Maybe you need a beer.

MOTHER. Beer don't replace nothin'.

FATHER. Works for me. Hell, don't matter about no plant job. They've been nothing but trouble for every family they've touched. Poisoning these waters while the big boys looked the other way. Remember those two headed lobsters? Freak of Mother Nature? Remember those newspaper guys saying "Lucky Find"? "Two Heads Are Better Than One"? somebody bought those headlines. Simple man knows that. We fell for it too till the tails were growing short, the eyes were bulging out. What did that one paper say? "Sky's The Limit For Lobster Fisherman"! Costs me more to run my boat than I can catch some years. It's been a gamble, hasn't it, Ma? Right place, right time. And now they're gone.

MOTHER. Maybe we can start over if the plant shuts down. Maybe move south, or west.

FATHER. We got time. Ain't no pink slips being handed out tonight. You still got your job.

MOTHER. What time is it?

FATHER. Time for a smooch and a beer. Pucker up.

MOTHER. You flirting with me? I'm worrying about putting food on the table and you're flirting with me?

FATHER. Always works. Worked for thirty years. I got it down to a science. Catching fish is the same. You got to have patience. Feel the moment. Then go in for the kill. You love these lips. These quirky, kissy, soft, wet, puckery lips.

MOTHER. It's your voice I fell for.

FATHER. My voice? I thought it was my sense of humor. Looks like it was just my lips.

MOTHER. Your voice. You should have been a radio actor.

FATHER. Radio actor? That's it, Ma. We'll move out west and I'll take care of you on my good looks, sense of humor, and acting abilities. That's right. At fifty I'll be a darn sex symbol. You won't have to worry about a thing. Nope. New life... Have another beer, Ma. That's a dream for kids.

MOTHER. Well, you're a star to me.

FATHER. Smooching time? "Star to me..." You flirting with me? Eh?

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MOTHER. Well, I guess I am. I was just looking for those paper napkins, you brought me a bag of garbage, and here we are like a couple of love birds, cooing away.

FATHER. You sorry you married me, Ma?

MOTHER. I'm sorry I didn't say maybe.

FATHER. Well, it was love at first sight for me – so I popped the question. Got down on all fours like a spaniel. You turned me down flat. What were you, ten?

MOTHER. Seven.

FATHER. Seven. You sure were pretty. I remember thinking “she's almost as pretty as my Mama”.

MOTHER. You looked like a jack-o-lantern. No teeth. Just like now.

FATHER. I got a few teeth left. Look at this smile. Right under the lips.

MOTHER. What would you have done if I said no and meant it?

FATHER. Moved on to Gracie Wilcox. She would've said yes right away.

MOTHER. Oh, now, you're making that up.

FATHER. Not making it up. She damn near proposed to me more than once.

MOTHER. More than once?

FATHER. Then there were those twins – what was their names?

MOTHER. Susie and Sarah.

FATHER. You looking a little jealous, Ma. After all these years those two little doll girls got you steamed?

MOTHER. Nope.

FATHER. Just a weensie bit?

MOTHER. You're imagining things.

FATHER. Love me, don't ya? Come on, say it. Out loud. Love me? No one will hear it. Put your lips together and say you love me.

MOTHER. Of course I love you. I married you, didn't I?

FATHER. Well Macs, you heard it. It's been said. Yep, my lucky day. I got the catch of a lifetime. This lady beside me is all I ever needed. No need to be rich. I'm a lucky man. Yessiree, luckiest man in this old town, this whole state, this whole planet, this big universe ever lived, ever gonna live.

MOTHER. You done?

FATHER. Maybe I'll just get down on all fours again and ask you right here to marry me.

MOTHER. If you get down, you won't be able to get back up.

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FATHER. Like a spaniel... here I go. Will you spend the rest of your life with me? For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health? Till death do us part?

MOTHER. If you get stuck down there, I'm not helping you up. I'm not.

FATHER. I'm old for this, honey.

MOTHER. Yes you are.

FATHER. Yes I am. Will you help me up? I'm stuck.

MOTHER. I told you so.

FATHER. Yes you did. Bending over lobster traps all these years put a strain on this lower back of mine. I'm stuck... yep, I am stuck.

MOTHER. What if I leave you down there? Who's gonna help you up? Gracie Wilcox? Susie and Sarah?

FATHER. I'll just keep on proposing till you go crazy. Day and night, same question, over and over. I'll wear you down. I'm a damned stubborn fool. You know I am.

MOTHER. Here, take my hand. *(He pulls her down to the floor. They both laugh like two crazy fools still young and in love.)*

FATHER. This floor sure is clean.

MOTHER. You could eat off of it.

FATHER. This what Macs sees?

MOTHER. I imagine it is.

FATHER. Is that gum under the table.

MOTHER. That little rascal. I always thought she was swallowing it. Don't know my own child.

FATHER. You keep a clean house, Ma. I kinda like the view from down here. Gives a man perspective, sitting on the bottom.

MOTHER. Well, we're not gonna just sit here. I ain't spending my wedding anniversary on the floor.

FATHER. When I get up I'm gonna set on the porch with you and count the stars. Connect the dots.

MOTHER. First we gotta get up, you crazy old fool.

FATHER. Come on, Ma. Let's get up and go out on the swing and count fireflies. Maybe even connect the dots. Left to right? Or is it right to left.

MOTHER. Yup... it was that voice of yours. Telling me the world was ours... we just had to stay still to catch it.

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FATHER. Did I say that? “stay still to catch it”? that’s good. I would have married me too. Darned romantic cuss, eh? I’m glad you said yes.

MOTHER. I said maybe.

FATHER. Then you said yes. Say it again.

MOTHER. Yes.

FATHER. Yessiree... one lucky man. Luckiest man on earth. I love you to the moon and back. Always have. Always will.

MOTHER. You are a darned romantic cuss.

FATHER. I am.

MOTHER. You am. (*As lights fade, a few fireflies appear through the window, and the sounds of night may be heard.*)

SCENE 3

The RADIO ANNOUNCER is speaking into a microphone in the local station.

RADIO ANNOUNCER. Good morning, folks, this is WCQD. Another uneventful night in Paradise. Mother Nature’s got a beautiful day in store. Forecast for tonight is clear and calm. The full moon’ll be shedding her magnificent glow up and down the shoreline. For those of you able to stay up past your bedtime, we got a promise of that new comet headed our way, so if you haven’t unpacked that telescope, set it up tonight. Summer don’t last all year. First one to call it in’ll get a free ice cream at the shack. And the pride of knowin’ you communed with nature. The sky’s a humbling place, they say. People been gazin’ up there for quite some time. Might even discover an asteroid or two, might shake loose and come crashing down. Be sure you call it in if you see that, folks. I’ll report it right here. Well, on to some music. Let’s see what I got here... (*He plays “Sentimental Journey” and starts to sing along as the music fades.*)

SCENE 4

Noontime at the beach.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Don’t touch it. Hey! Don’t touch it.

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YOUNG GABRIELLE. There's two of them, two horseshoe crabs. Ooh... they're stuck together.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Why are they stuck together?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. It moved. Put it down. Maybe it's a sea monster.

YOUNG MICHELLE. It's a horseshoe crab.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Don't touch it. It's poisonous.

YOUNG MICHELLE. It's not a sea monster.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Maybe it is a sea monster.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Be careful. My mother got stung by a jellyfish once.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. I saw a shark once.

YOUNG MICHELLE. A real shark?

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Sharks aren't real.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Sharks are real.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Sharks aren't real. Your parents just want to scare you.

YOUNG MICHELLE. They're laying their eggs.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What do their eggs look like?

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Where did you get that rock?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. How far can it go? Throw it.

YOUNG MICHELLE. You need a flatter one.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Here's a rock. Want to see how far I can throw it? Watch how far this can go.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Watch me! Mine can go farther.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Ready? I'm left-handed. Watch this.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Hey... I found seaweed.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. That's mermaid's hair. Seaweed is mermaid's hair. You can tell because it's green.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Mermaids aren't real. Just like sharks.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I'm gonna get you!

YOUNG GABRIELLE. You can't get me. I'm too fast. I'm a good swimmer.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I'm a good swimmer too. My mother says I swim like a seahorse. My name's Michelle. What's yours?

YOUNG RAPHAEL. How old are you?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. I'm hungry. I want an ice cream.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Me too.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Me too. Me too!

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YOUNG MICHELLE. I found a stingray

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What's a stingray?

YOUNG MICHELLE. That is a stingray.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. What is it?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. We need an expert. My daddy's an expert.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Expert what?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. An expert at everything. Just ask him. He's a scientist.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. What?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. A scientist.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Dig a hole.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. I don't have a shovel.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. I have a shovel.

YOUNG MICHELLE. My father's a lobsterman.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. What's that?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Dig a hole. Let's put the hole right here.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. The sand is hot. I want an ice cream.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Me too.

ALL THREE. Me too, me too. Hey, hey, hey, wait up! Wait for me...

SCENE 5

Father is seated on the porch at dusk with Macs at his feet.

FATHER. Well, Macs, what's keeping your Ma? Probably got a boyfriend at that old plant. Your Ma was a looker when she was young. Had herself a line-up of offers. You're wondering why she picked me, aren't ya now? I smelled good. I wove a spell from the sea. She fell hard, boy. Never been the same. Sold my soul to Neptune. I went out, looked to the left, looked to the right, and right there, bending over, I saw the sweetest gal. A vision. Yeah, she was a vision, collecting seashells or some darn thing. I dove right in, swam to shore, and with the sun on my back and sand on my knees, got down like a fool and told her I had a vision of marrying a mysterious creature from the sea. She stared at me like I was from outer space. The rest is a blur. I reckon she said yes... maybe she said maybe. So that's it, old boy. She trapped me. And I'm glad of it. Any questions? So... mermaids are real, old

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boy. Ask any sailor... Sometimes we can catch 'em. I married one. Yes sir, I got me a siren. (*Mother enters.*)

MOTHER. Sorry I'm late.

FATHER. Macs and I were getting ready to send out a search party.

MOTHER. Been walking around town looking for a place to hide. I got called in at lunchtime. Told to go home. They heard you been saying the ocean ain't as clean as it used to be, or somethin'.

FATHER. That's a fact.

MOTHER. They don't like what you been saying about the lobsters being smaller and sickly.

FATHER. Hell, any fool can see... They ain't sick. They're dying!

MOTHER. Any fool can see you been shooting your mouth off in the wrong circles. Got a list, those big boys, and we're on it. Lucky you ain't had a boating accident. Sea kills a lot of men. We got a child. It's hard for a woman alone. Don't seem to understand, a lot of people relying on their jobs. Most people look the other way. What's wrong with me? Don't I like my job? Don't I like having food on the table? Don't I have enough to worry about?

FATHER. Me...

MOTHER. They asked me where Michelle was. Asked me if I ever thought of life without her. I knew what they were getting at. I know where she goes at night? Who she's with? Why don't I know? What kind of mother am I? Don't I give a damn about my own child?

FATHER. I'll kill the bastards.

MOTHER. They said if I ask the wrong questions of the wrong people in this town my kid will be blacklisted... that's if we're lucky. Dead is what they meant. Isn't it?

FATHER. So it's war then.

MOTHER. With the good old boys? They own the town... they own the jobs... they own me. They own you.

FATHER. Nobody owns you, woman! I'm not scared of no two bit bullies, no snakes from hell. God gets those kind of me. He gets 'em.

MOTHER. This ain't about God.

FATHER. Some skunk spraying you with poison is just that: a skunk. Smells to ordinary folk. Most folks walk the other way 'cause they don't want to get sprayed

MOTHER. They had me sign a paper... to keep my job. A paper...

FATHER. A paper? What kind of paper? What did it say? What did it say, Ma?

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MOTHER. It said...

FATHER. What's the matter with you?

MOTHER. I didn't sign it.

FATHER. You didn't sign it? What did it say? What the hell did it say?

MOTHER. It don't matter. It don't matter at all.

FATHER. I guess that's it.

MOTHER. That's it.

FATHER. You want me to go in and talk to them?

MOTHER. I begged for my job. You don't need to.

FATHER. They made you beg?

MOTHER. You been listening to me? We don't have a pot to piss in. never have, never gonna have. Yes... I begged. Any woman with a right mind would beg. I begged them to leave my family alone. I begged for my baby. I begged for you. For you. I begged. I begged hard. I begged, I begged, I begged. Just like they wanted.

FATHER. This family don't beg for nothing from no one. You think I go out every morning and face Mother Nature to come ashore and have to bend over for pigs? They're common pigs. Just 'cause their family was here first and killed off the natives, don't make 'em nothing. They got land... they got concrete and wood, but they got no soul. Not one of them bastards deserves a good man's handshake. Everybody in this town knows it. They been cutting deals and cutting throats forever. Always will. Corruption is like that. So many lies, the truth evaporated a long time ago. Can't trust nothing but the sea, Ma. Nothing but the sea. More than half the planet is covered in water. Can't trust the land, Ma... no man of the land. You trust the sea.

MOTHER. I don't trust nothin'! No one!!! I'm going to bed.

FATHER. You go, Ma. You rest. Macs and I will guard this old shack. Ain't no skunks coming around tonight. I'll get up extra early tomorrow, be an extra-good fishing day. An extra-good one. Trust the water, Ma... the stars and the water. We can count on the almighty stars and sea. Been here long before us. Gonna be here when we're gone.

MOTHER. Good night.

FATHER. Sweet dreams.

MOTHER. Sweet dreams. (*Mother goes inside.*)

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FATHER. Tonight's a night for wishing on stars. Maybe discover a comet or two. I do that and you'll never have to work another day, Ma. Not another darned day. I'll stay up all night... All night. I'll do it. It's my turn. I been relying on you too much. Sending you off to that factory to poison yourself, day after day. Why? So I could think deep thoughts. Dream of being special, like I used to be. We all want to be what we imagined ourselves to be, Ma. I can change, can't I? I used to protect... I was king, king of the sea. A long time ago. I want it back. Before it's too late. I want it back.

SCENE 6

Early afternoon at the beach.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. I heard big crabs eat the little ones.

YOUNG MICHELLE. What if the little one's a baby?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What if it's the mommy?

YOUNG RAPHAEL. How many legs does a crab have?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Ten. Eight legs and two pincers.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Ever eat a crab?

YOUNG MICHELLE. My father is allergic to shellfish.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What's 'allergic'?

YOUNG MICHELLE. He can touch 'em, he just can't eat 'em.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What happens if he does?

YOUNG MICHELLE. His skin gets prickly.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Does he turn blue?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Red... I think.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Red like a sunburn?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Red like a lobster. After it's cooked, of course.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. You know what? My daddy says a lobster is a prehistoric insect.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Insect?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Insect.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I hate bugs.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Me too. Especially horseflies.

YOUNG MICHELLE. When I grown up I'm gonna catch pirates.

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YOUNG GABRIELLE. I'm gonna be rich. I'm gonna own the whole ocean.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. I'm gonna build skyscrapers high in the sky and block the sun.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I found some pirate gold.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Did not.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. Long John Silver's?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Bigger. The biggest menace of the sea.

YOUNG GABRIELLE. What's a 'menace'?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Dangerous. I can spell it, too. M – E – N... I – S.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. I can spell. Maybe we should make a map.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Bottle... we need a bottle. We can send a message in a bottle.

YOUNG RAPHAEL. Where are we gonna find a bottle?

YOUNG GABRIELLE. I'll bring one tomorrow. A milk bottle.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Great! Tomorrow. We'll meet here tomorrow. But first: take the oath. To protect from all villains... till death do us part... our treasures. And if anyone gets in our way, or disturbs our secrets... we kill 'em!

SCENE 7

The kitchen, late evening. Crickets may be heard. MICHELLE is at the table trying to find a radio station as Mother enters.

MOTHER. Michelle, don't you stay up late. Your father's got a lot on his mind. Me too, I reckon. More than my life's share. More than most women could handle. But I'm gonna handle it. Got to. The women in this town's been handling more than they know... Never mind. Just get to bed at a decent hour. I don't mean after midnight. You understand? You listening?

MICHELLE. What?

MOTHER. You been listening to me? You got seaweed between those ears? Like your Pa... all that space. Filled with dreams.

MICHELLE. Saving the planet isn't a dream. It's a reality, Ma.

MOTHER. That's what I said: dreams. Planet... thought you were studying Mars. All that money... to study Mars. You're studying Mars, ain't you, Michelle? Got

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your paper almost done... then you can put it behind you and work at the plant with me. Settle down, start a family.

MICHELLE. Ma, you're getting ahead of yourself. I'm not settling down. I got a job offer to do something important. Real important.

MOTHER. Startin' a family's important enough.

Everything stems from that. Every decision. Once you got kids you get your priorities real straight. You'll be a good provider, Michelle. Got my brains... you'll survive in this world. The plant's a... safety net.

MICHELLE. I'm quitting school, Ma.

MOTHER. Oh, that's a good one. See, you got a sense of humor too! Got that from your Pa. Quitting school. What are you gonna do? Gonna live here with us your whole life? Gonna be the last surviving fisherman? Gonna carry the torch for your old man? Write poetry, gaze at the stars, and be the laughingstock of the town? "That Michelle, she don't have a pound of sense. Just like her father." Now go to bed. Stop talking like a crazy fool. You're a smart girl, Michelle. Lot of people like to have a portion of that brain of yours... your Pa included.

MICHELLE. I'm not that smart, Ma. You dreamed me smarter than I was. I can't be the girl you want... only the one I am. I got to be true to myself, Ma. I don't want to be like you...

MOTHER. Like me?

MICHELLE. I'm not selling out, Ma. There's only a few things I've found worth loving: the sea... the sky... and you and Pa. But I'm not selling out!

MOTHER. Glad I'm on that list. Hope I'm at the top. The sea and sky... Your Ma at the top?

MICHELLE. Oh, Ma... you're at the top. All I'm saying is your list don't include the sea and the stars. Why not, Ma? Why'd you go and work for a bunch of people who don't respect anything? The don't even respect you, Ma, for makin' them all that money.

MOTHER. You don't know nothin' about that. (*Father enters.*)

FATHER. What's all the commotion in here?

MOTHER. Michelle was just goin' to bed. Get a good night's sleep. Can't wait to be a doctor... Just...

MICHELLE. Laying it all out for her, Pa.

FATHER. Laying it all out?

STARLIGHT

MICHELLE. Not going back to school, Pa. can't cut it. Figured that out. Doing the right thing: I'm not going back.

FATHER. Maybe your Ma is right. Go to bed. Person can't think when they're tired. Or else they think real clear. Sometimes I stay up and think, and think, and think, till I realize I been asleep and my body just don't know it.

MICHELLE. Pa, you understand. A person's got to have their space... a rock they can call their own. I got to find my own.

FATHER. Rock?

MOTHER. Rocks in their heads. Lucky a mother don't waste no time thinkin' about her space. Know how many work at that "no good plant" in town? Every woman I know.

FATHER. Except for the Wilcoxes, course... they own it.

MOTHER. Just a few at the top of the food chain, all born with silver spoons in their mouths. Let a few more unborn babies die while they sip their wine and count their profits...

FATHER. Man don't need half of what they got. The world's gone amok. Out on a rock, at night, the universe is clear. We ain't nothin' but a speck... dim, unrecognizable speck. If there is life up there in that sky of ours it sure wouldn't want to join us down here.

MICHELLE. You can say that again.

MOTHER. See what I mean? You two can go to the bottom of the sea and up to the stars in one short conversation. Dreamers. The world don't need to hear from you now, do they?

FATHER. Oh, Ma, what would this world be like without us? You need us... to keep your soul attached.

MOTHER. Don't you worry about my soul bein' attached...

FATHER. You know what I mean. A man who's separated from his soul is... well, he's already dead.

MOTHER. I ain't talkin' about no dead men. I'm goin' to bed. You two got any sense you'll go yourselves.

MICHELLE. He don't have any sense, Ma... that's why we love him.

MOTHER. Michelle...

MICHELLE. Ma...

FATHER. Let's call a truce between the sides. Ain't gonna solve nothin' tonight.

MICHELLE. Stay up with me, Pa?

STARLIGHT

FATHER. Might do that.

MICHELLE. G'night, Ma.

MOTHER. Sweet dreams. Love you two. (*Mother exits.*)

FATHER. You know why I don't give up my dreams?

MICHELLE. Me?

FATHER. You? Hell, no. my father

MICHELLE. I thought you said he drank himself into an early grave.

FATHER. Smoked, drank, let my Ma down... Choice between a jug of milk and a bottle of booze, well...

MICHELLE. The booze always won.

FATHER. Man dies young without any dreams. He was right about a few things, though. Life is short.

MICHELLE. Being a dreamer make you gloomy, Pa?

FATHER. No, I ain't gloomy. Suppose I'm a cynic underneath this positive skin. Crack a few jokes, put on a smile, no one sees my vulnerabilities. For a man to expose his vulnerability, his soft side, is... well, not a damn smart thing. Lobsters outgrow their shells, they have to grow a new one, over and over and over. That state of... shelllessness... damned risky. That's why they hide in the rocks. Rocks is shelter... for lobsters, just like for men. Everyone got to have a good hiding place. I got this here shack. This is heaven here... protected by the stars above. And Ma... she protects this old shack, Michelle. Been a few storms shoulda blown it away. Why not? Plenty of other folks lost everything. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes... name 'em. Your Ma... she's a lucky woman. Ain't lost much. Oh, she's thinkin' she ain't got her share. Truth is she got more than she can handle. Lost a few babies. Guars herself by guarding you and me. Done a right good job in a town like this.

MICHELLE. That's why I'm getting out.

FATHER. I'll talk to your Ma... soften her up. We'll talk tomorrow. I know how you feel. Ain't a soul alive want to give up their dreams.

We owe a lot to your Ma. She buried them all 'cause of me... you. You think I could've taken care of you on my catches? Sad truth is I been holdin' onto my dreams too long. Every other man hung up his boots, joined the plant.

MICHELLE. I'm like you, Pa. I'm not joining this rat race.

FATHER. Yep, that's what it is.

MICHELLE. You know I'm right.

STARLIGHT

FATHER. Know you are.

MICHELLE. So tell her.

FATHER. Tell her?

MICHELLE. Tell her. Tell her she's made the wrong choices.

FATHER. You ain't been listenin' to me. she made the right choices... for her.

MICHELLE. Not me.

FATHER. Not you.

MICHELLE. I'm a dreamer, Pa.

FATHER. Ain't your fault. In your genes or something. My side of the family, we always been this way. Goes back a long way. Every last one of us loved the sea. Rather be out there than in here. Ain't nothin' but crazy. Maybe it's a curse... maybe we all got it. I was kinda hopin' it'd skipped you.

MICHELLE. The research I've been doin' scared me, Pa. there's all kinds of stuff buried out there. Right out there.

FATHER. What kind of stuff?

MICHELLE. Waste... tons and tons of waste. When it surfaces...

FATHER. When it surfaces?

MICHELLE. I been getting' threats. To stop my research. Threats... damn real, Pa.

FATHER. Can you prove it?

MICHELLE. Yeah.

FATHER. What kind of waste?

MICHELLE. Waste, Pa. That ocean, right there, gonna vomit it up. We're gonna start reapin' what we been sowin'. Time's runnin' out.. lobsters're just one of the casualties. You know how much pesticide's gone out to sea from every farmer that used DDT right on down? Down the rivers, down the lakes. The planet's trying to recycle poison, Pa. the ozone is shot, the sea... every person alive's gonna get cancer. It's evolution, Pa. We're just another endangered species. It's over.

FATHER. And you thought I was gloomy.

MICHELLE. That's not all.

FATHER. Might need a beer to hear what you been doin' at that school. Maybe two. Evolution, endangered species, cancer... Over?

MICHELLE. Stuff's in the sky, too.

FATHER. Yeah?

MICHELLE. Wait'll it starts falling.

STARLIGHT

FATHER. See? There's the dreamer part of ya comin' out.

MICHELLE. Earth's due for another asteroid hit.

FATHER. Where'd ya get that?

MICHELLE. We been changing the atmosphere, changing the magnetic pull. Those asteroid's paths the ones that cross ours... well, the near misses won't be near this time. The cycle's complete. We're the dinosaurs. Won't survive when they knock the planet right off it's axis.

FATHER. Thought you were studyin' Mars.

MICHELLE. There was life up there, Pa. Water, just like here. The polar caps are frozen carbon dioxide. When Mars was cooler the water flowed freely. Maybe the other planets too. Uranus got hit... it's on it's side, turned almost ninety degrees. The likelihood of an asteroid strike is once every quarter million years.

FATHER. We got time...

MICHELLE. I don't think so. That's why I'm taking this job.

FATHER. I'm a simple fisherman. Last one in town.

Last one. Don't really want to be the last one. Man's counted on the sea for thousands of years.

MICHELLE. You're not listening, Pa. The ocean is dying. The drums are leaking. It's all coming ashore.

FATHER. You researched all this out? The ocean dying?

MICHELLE. And more.

FATHER. You should go to bed. Lot to think about. I need to think about this. The ocean is dying... right in front of my eyes. (*Mother enters.*)

MOTHER. Thought I heard you talkin' down here. Couldn't sleep. Stars blazin' away, keepin' me up. Got one shinin' through my window keeps gettin' brighter and brighter. Thought it was a firefly... almost swatted at it.

MICHELLE. Think about what I told you, Pa.

FATHER. I'll be thinkin'.

MOTHER. Tomorrow's an early one.

MICHELLE. I love you, Ma.

MOTHER. Sure love you too.

FATHER. Star, you say? Peepin' through your window? Better stay up, guard this old place against that peepin' star. Reckon your Ma could use some company. Let Macs out... he'll be back around soon enough. Keep you company. You can talk to him. Right good listener. Right good. G'night.

STARLIGHT

SCENE 8

Mid-afternoon at the beach.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I found a treasure. Mama, Mama, look!

YOUNG MOTHER. Put it in the bucket. Never mind. Bring it here.

YOUNG MICHELLE. It says... I can't read it. Po... poi... Sun. Mama, how do you spell sun?

YOUNG MOTHER. S-U-N.

YOUNG MICHELLE. This says S-O-N.

YOUNG MOTHER. Throw it back.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Its buried treasure, Mama. I found pirate gold. Except it's not gold.

YOUNG MOTHER. Bring your pirate gold. It's getting late.

Tonight's an eclipse. Your father's been talking about it for two months.

YOUNG MICHELLE. What's an eclipse.

YOUNG MOTHER. The moon covers the sun. or is it the sun covers the moon? It gets dark, Michelle. Your father wants to see it.

YOUNG MICHELLE. How can he see it if it's dark? We gonna have cake?

YOUNG MOTHER. Nope, just an eclipse. Now come on.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I'm bringing him this pirate gold. I'm showing Daddy. He'll be proud of me.

YOUNG MOTHER. Yes he will. You're a real smart girl. Gonna be something someday. Who knows, maybe you'll be an astronaut.

YOUNG MICHELLE. What's that? I want to be an ice cream man. They make lots of money. They make children happy. I want to make lots and lots of children happy. And be rich. Really, really rich. Like the Wilcoxes.

YOUNG MOTHER. Let's go.

YOUNG MICHELLE. How'd they get so rich?

YOUNG MOTHER. The plant.

YOUNG MICHELLE. What plant? What's the plant, Mama?

YOUNG MOTHER. Pirate's gold. Let's go. Got a heap of chores to do. Laundry, cleaning, cooking...

YOUNG MICHELLE. Eclipsing?

YOUNG MOTHER. Eclipsing? I don't think that's a word.

STARLIGHT

YOUNG MICHELLE. It's a word. I said it. Eclipsing.

YOUNG MOTHER. If you say so.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I love you, Mama.

YOUNG MOTHER. Not as much as I love you.

YOUNG MICHELLE. To the moon and back.

YOUNG MOTHER. Well, I love you to Pluto and back.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Oh yeah? Well, I love you to Mars and all around the solar system and back.

YOUNG MOTHER. I love you to Andromeda.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Mama?

YOUNG MOTHER. Yes, Michelle.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Never mind.

YOUNG MOTHER. What is it?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Maybe pirates aren't real.

YOUNG MOTHER. They're real.

YOUNG MICHELLE. You ever see one?

YOUNG MOTHER. Every day.

YOUNG MICHELLE. Are they scary?

YOUNG MOTHER. Yeah.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I'll protect you.

YOUNG MOTHER. Me? From pirates?

YOUNG MICHELLE. Arghhh, matey, I'll slit their throats!

YOUNG MOTHER. Come on, now.

YOUNG MICHELLE. I'll cut out their gizzards and feed 'em to the seagulls! I'll tie 'em to a rock...

YOUNG MOTHER. Michelle...

YOUNG MICHELLE. Shhh... listen! Hear it? The mermaids are singing. Take the oath, Mama.

YOUNG MOTHER. I take the oath.

YOUNG MICHELLE. To protect the earth and sea and sky from the pirates.

YOUNG MOTHER. As long as I live...

YOUNG MICHELLE. Swear on Venus and Mars and Neptune.

YOUNG MOTHER. From this day forward...

YOUNG MICHELLE. For ever and ever. I love you to the moon and back!

STARLIGHT

SCENE 9

Mid-morning. Father sitting on the shack porch with Macs at his feet. Michelle enters.

FATHER. Mornin'.

MICHELLE. Morning.

FATHER. You were up late.

MICHELLE. Yeah. A lot to look at.

FATHER. Your Ma's worried about you.

MICHELLE. Me?

FATHER. Thinks that group of yours... Well, you know your Ma. Thinks you should stay in school and...

MICHELLE. Work at the factory to pay for it. Sell out!

FATHER. That's about it.

MICHELLE. You should've never taught me about the sea.

FATHER. What's the sea got to do with you finishing school?

MICHELLE. Oh Pa, give me a break. You never wanted me to finish school like Ma did. You know I can make something of this.

FATHER. Environmental... what is it? Action group. City folks. Bunch of high falutin', save the shoreline, radicalized, know-it-all pressure cookers.

MICHELLE. Protectionists.

FATHER. Excuse me for saying so, but who's funding these folks? Oil companies? Car companies? They're all the same, you know. All tied up together in a big old knot. Even a simple man like me knows that.

MICHELLE. You taught me right and wrong. You trust me, don't you?

FATHER. I said your Ma was worried.

MICHELLE. Ma's got nothing to worry about. She's got you.

FATHER. You'll break her heart. You gonna do that?

MICHELLE. Here we go...

FATHER. That lady been working herself to death. Had a dream or two for you. Dreamt about you becoming an astronaut or doctor or, hell, President if you put your mind to it.

STARLIGHT

MICHELLE. I'm fighting City Hall, Pa. Gonna fight 'em hard, too. Gonna win. Gonna make you proud of me. Ever since I was little I had a notion that the world was fair. I was wrong. I see what these greedy bastards have done to Ma. I've seen it with my own eyes. I've heard the backstabbing people in this town, the good churchgoing people, talking about her and you. "Well, if only that no good husband of hers would get a real job, 'stead of relying on..." You know the rest. Ma's looking old. That factory has aged her. She used to be my sweet, funny Mama. Now she's... scared. Scared of being alone if something happened to you or me. Why's she helping those people if they won't help her back? Not one person visits her when she's sick. The church folks? They visit. Once. Want to look on the table to see if she's reading her Bible. Want to take her money to give to poor people. What are we, Pa? Borrowing wood from a church. I'm not gonna be poor like Ma and...

FATHER. You can stop right there.

MICHELLE. Stop? Stop?

FATHER. You just stop now. I got to go fishing this morning.

MICHELLE. Today's the day...

FATHER. Every day's the day.

MICHELLE. Maybe the townspeople were right. Maybe you should've worked the plant.

FATHER. You're coming with me.

MICHELLE. I'm not. I'm gonna make something of myself.

FATHER. You saying we didn't make a good life for you? You saying that?

MICHELLE. A good life? For me? I love you, Pa... I just don't want to live in dream. I don't want to miss my life. I want to catch the bastards who've been ruining this town, ruining this ocean. The ocean is dead, Pa. you smell it, you see the crap that's coming ashore. Remember when I was little? There were birds, and fish... sounds above, sounds below. Something's not right. I gotta go. Before it's too late.

FATHER. Here, take a few bucks.

MICHELLE. I'm fine... I'll be okay. I'm not taking any more of your money.

FATHER. You're my girl.

MICHELLE. I'm gonna make you proud.

FATHER. Gonna get yourself killed. You're a sweet girl.

MICHELLE. I gotta go. Tell Ma I love her.

STARLIGHT

FATHER. You love her? You gonna take on the world... yeah, I reckon you do. She comes down here, you gone, gonna break her heart. Gonna ask me where'd you go, why'd you leave. Have to pick her up off of the floor. Go. We're here. Nothin's gonna change. Write. You could still fish with me. Better go now before I try and talk you out of it.

MICHELLE. I love you, Pa. I'm gonna get the bastards.

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