

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

by Frank Ceruzzi

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

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In memory of my mother, Christa Lydia Ceruzzi

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

- BOY** *Age 14. To some he's a savior; to others he's the enemy. Enough of a presence to command total respect and fear, but still very much a boy who has sacrificed everything to find himself lost.*
- ANTON** *60s; the Boy's grandfather. A man with the wisdom of the past, but also a deep concern for the future. He's a protector and a storyteller.*
- DAVID** *Mid 30s; he's searching for a place in this brave new world, but he's growing tired of waiting. His frustration and anger are tempered by his hope for a new sense of purpose.*
- DAKE** *20s; he wants to say and do the right thing, but he can't shake the pull of the past or silence the voices in his head.*
- MARTA** *40s; a mother who knows the agony of waiting but isn't ready to give up. Her indefatigable spirit is matched by her street smarts and a quick wit.*
- ELOISE** *Mid-to-late 30s; David's wife. A woman torn between worlds, a harbinger of secrets. Her slight frame might make her easy to underestimate; her circumstances might make her willing to risk it all.*
- GIRL** *Age ten. She's trying hard to play the role of "grown up"—but each sound or shadow has the voice and shape of her mother.*
- KATHERINE** *Early 30s; Eloise's friend and confidante. She's a survivor with a strong sense of loyalty and purpose.*
- MAN** *Played by the same actor as Anton; now appears middle-aged.*

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SCENES

Prologue: Behind the waiting room wall.

Scene 1: The waiting room. Morning.

Scene 2: David and Eloise's kitchen. Earlier that morning.

Scene 3: Behind the waiting room wall. Morning.

Interlude 1: Behind the waiting room wall.

Scene 4: David and Eloise's kitchen. Late morning.

Scene 5: The waiting room. Late morning.

Interlude 2: Behind the waiting room wall.

Scene 6: Marta's flat. High noon.

Scene 7: The hallway at Central.

Scene 8: Inside Central.

Scene 9: David and Eloise's kitchen. Afternoon.

Scene 10: The waiting room/behind the wall. Afternoon.

Epilogue: St. Martin's Park. Months later.

SETTING

Earth. The near future.

NOTE

Round Went the Wheel is performed without an intermission.

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

Round Went the Wheel premiered in August of 2019 at the Broadway Bound Theatre Festival at Theatre Row in New York City. The production featured the following cast and creative team:

BOY:	Coltrane Gilman
ANTON:	Michael Gnat*
DAVID:	Rafael Jordan*
DAKE:	Victor Y. Chen
MARTA:	Marie Elèna O'Brien*
ELOISE:	Christina Toth
GIRL:	Oriah Elgrabli
KATHERINE:	Moira McAuliffe
GIRL (alt.):	Ariela Rozentul

Director:	Janet Bentley
Scenic Design:	Daniel Patrick Hogan
Lighting Design:	Mike Schulz
Sound Design:	Andy Evan Cohen and Janet Bentley**
Projection Design:	Andy Evan Cohen
Costume Design:	Catherine Fisher
Prod. Stage Manager:	Adam Sherwin
Asst. Stage Manager:	Justyn Wade
Prod. Photographer:	Emily Hewitt

**Actor appeared courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.*

***Original music for this production composed by Roly Poly Productions (Janet Bentley and Andy Evan Cohen).*

Special Thanks: Kevin Brush, Patryk Rogowski, Joshua Towvim, Jennifer Rosenzweig, Karine Schaefer, Stephen Mounkhal, Rachel Warshowsky Stark, Nicole Jakymiw, Wes Phillipson, Lenore Skomal, Rick Sayers, KM Jones, Theatre Row, Peter Pugliese, my Greeley “brothers” Robert Zambarnadi and Peter Metzler, my real brother Duane Stover, and to the real “Pop-Pop”, Thomas Ceruzzi.

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AWARDS AND HONORS

Round Went the Wheel was an Official Selection of the 2021 New Media Film Festival, a finalist for Acadiana Repertory Theatre's 2018 theatrical season, and a semi-finalist for the 2018 Austin Film Festival (Stage Play Competition).

SONGS, STORIES, POEMS AND PAINTINGS

Marta's song uses text from Edgar Allan Poe's "A Dream Within a Dream", first published in the Boston periodical *The Flag of Our Union* in 1849. This poem is in the public domain. You may compose your own music for her song, or you may contact Janet Bentley and Andy Evan Cohen at www.rolypolyproductions.com.

Anton and the Boy sing excerpts from Thomas Haynes Bayly's "Long, Long Ago", written and composed in 1833. This song is in the public domain.

Excerpts from "Rumpelstiltskin" taken from translations of Grimm's *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* by Edgar Taylor and Marian Edwardes. These tales are in the public domain.

Excerpts from Walt Whitman's "To Think of Time" taken from *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*. This poem is in the public domain.

Emily Dickinson's "'Hope' is thing with feathers" (c. 1861) is in the public domain.

Portrait of Dora Maar is a 1937 oil on canvas painting by Pablo Picasso.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus is attributed to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1558.

A NOTE ON BICYCLES

For the 2019 production at Theatre Row, we created the illusion of David building the bicycle in Scene 1 by using a ZiZZO folding bike. In Scene 5 we had two bicycles on stage, one for the Boy and one for the Girl; if budget and space allow, additional bicycles would create a powerful stage picture.

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PROLOGUE

Darkness. From opposite sides of the stage emerge two figures in silhouette: a BOY and ANTON. They cross, circle one another, then assume their positions: Anton sketching at an artist's desk, the Boy downstage with his legs crossed. The lights grow brighter as they speak. The opening scene feels as if it exists outside of time and place.

ANTON. It's nearly finished.

BOY. Take your time.

ANTON. You sit so still. For so long. The others—inside? They pace and putter. No patience.

BOY. I have my whole life ahead of me.

ANTON. Ah, yes. *(He shades something in.)* And then one day you'll be walking down a road and stop, dead in your tracks. You'll look back over your shoulder. And you'll see it there, stacked up behind you. Your whole life. You'll wonder how it all got there. How quickly it all went. *(As if saying a magic word.)* Time.

BOY. Is that what you're drawing me? A fable?

ANTON. You'll see.

BOY. A landscape. Like the Bruegel. *(Anton shakes his head no.)* A self-portrait?

ANTON. Do you know the first words that Picasso spoke to his mother?

BOY. Tell me.

ANTON. *Piz. Piz.*

BOY. How polite he was.

ANTON. *Piz.* Short for lapiz.

BOY. Pencil?

ANTON. Very good. He knew. Even then.

BOY. He *sensed* it.

ANTON. You remind me so much of him.

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BOY. Picasso?

ANTON. *(With a light laugh.)* No, no. Your father.

BOY. *(Stiffening.)* We agreed not to speak of him.

ANTON. You're going to have to talk about it. Sooner or later—

BOY. I know what's necessary.

ANTON. He knew it would be you. A father knows his son. A father—

BOY. We agreed—

ANTON. He's part of the story.

BOY. No. Not anymore.

ANTON. *(Putting down the sketch and approaching the Boy.)* When Picasso painted "Dora Maar"? He was challenging us—to see the world with new eyes. *(As if seeing the painting in front of him.)* Just look at her! There she is, full face, one red eye wide-open, staring right back at you. And there she is again! Her face in profile, that skewed blue iris staring off to the side.

BOY. It's hard to know where to begin.

ANTON. Don't look everywhere at once. Take your time. Listen. Let the red-eyed woman speak to you. It's a story only she can tell. And then, when you're ready, begin again. There's the blue-eyed woman. Ready. And waiting.

BOY. To tell her story.

ANTON. No, my boy. To tell yours. *(The sound of a clock ticking, slowly at first, then as if time is spinning out of control. The stage goes black.)*

SCENE ONE

A waiting room. A number of large boxes fill the stage. Fluorescent lights hang from the ceiling; one bulb flickers and buzzes. Downstage right there is an exterior door. Upstage there is a door to an interior room, locked shut. An old-fashioned clock hangs next to the door; the time is stuck at 7:15. Along the edges of the room are make-shift couches. On them, three people sit and wait: DAKE, MARTA, and Anton. A fourth, DAVID, paces the room, paperwork in hand.

DAVID. We've been waiting so long. *(No one responds. Anton reads a newspaper as Dake stares out into space. Marta keeps her head down.)* A long, long time. *(Examining the clock.)* I don't think the hands have moved. Do you? *(Silence. He crosses to Anton.)* When did you arrive?

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ANTON. Do you mind?

DAVID. *(Indicating the newspaper.)* You're not going to find anything new in there.

ANTON. It's preparation. A man's mind needs training.

DAVID. They're not going to quiz you on the damn thing.

ANTON. And how would you know that? *(Beat. David moves upstage, put his ear to the door.)* Just after six o'clock.

DAVID. What?

ANTON. I know it's time when I hear them coming down the street. Then it's a twenty-minute walk. Through Saint Martin's Park and up the steep hill? Can't climb it like I used to. So I'm saving my breath. For what's ahead. *(David crosses to sit next to Dake, who is still staring off into space. He drags over a box, puts his feet up, tries to focus. Nothing happens. And then: the upstage door swings open. We hear a muffled voice off-stage.)*

VOICE (O.S.). Shepard? *(No response.)* Shepard? Dake Shepard?

DAKE. *(Standing; like a schoolboy.)* Here!

VOICE (O.S.). It's time.

DAVID. *(Blocking Dake's path.)* We've been waiting longer than you.

ANTON. Let the man be.

DAVID. What? Just because he's younger he gets called first?

VOICE (O.S.). **DAKE.** **SHEPARD.** *(Dake tries to move around David.)*

ANTON. *(To David.)* I would think about what you're doing, my friend. *(Beat. David fights his impulses, steps out of the way. Dake fixes his shirt, walks through the door. It slams shut.)*

DAVID. But he just arrived. Not even an hour ago.

MARTA. *(Looking up for the first time.)* What do you know of waiting?

ANTON. You said you didn't know the time.

DAVID. I know what an hour feels like.

ANTON. Aren't you here to become part of something new?

DAVID. Yes. Of course.

ANTON. Then you should sit. Reflect. Prepare for what's to come.

DAVID. What? Like her, curled up like a child until her name is called?

MARTA. A child?

DAVID. Or like you? Reading the same propaganda hours on end?

ANTON. It's not propaganda. It's poetry—

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DAVID. Or that guy? Some new recruit? Look at him. He's not ready. He hasn't let it go. Do they think they can— *(There's a loud bang from the other side of the wall. Everyone freezes. When David speaks again, it's in a softer voice.)* Is it Him? Behind that door?

ANTON. You ask a lot of questions.

DAVID. My wife says it's my way of telling a story.

MARTA. What's her name?

DAVID. *(To Anton.)* Ha, you see? I'm not the only one. *(To Marta.)* Why do you want to know her name?

MARTA. I'm wondering if I know her. Your wife.

DAVID. I don't think you would. *(And then, after a moment:)* Eloise.

MARTA. A pretty name. Like a fairy tale.

DAVID. El loves fairy tales. Sometimes, when I can't sleep, she tells me stories from another time. The prodigal son returning home. The Little Match-Seller. Rumpelstiltskin at his wheel. "Round about, round about, lo and behold. Reel away, reel away, straw into gold, straw into gold."

MARTA. *(Joining in at the end.)* "...straw into gold, straw into gold."

DAVID. Yes.

MARTA. My daughter's favorite.

DAVID. *(He eyes Marta with caution. Beat. He crosses to a box, rubs his hand across the top.)* I hear they have warehouses filled with devices.

MARTA. So they say.

DAVID. Portables, VR-5's, you name it. The future. Sitting there, collecting dust.

MARTA. There are people. Off the grid.

DAVID. People?

MARTA. Who want to go back. They took the devices, removed the chips. They couldn't wipe it from our minds.

DAVID. How do you—

MARTA. I hear whispers. In the streets.

ANTON. That's not our concern, my friends.

MARTA. Oh, I don't know.

ANTON. You don't *know*?

MARTA. I'm interested. I like to know the score. How the deck is stacked.

DAVID. The hand we've been dealt.

MARTA. *(Gazing at the clock.)* And we've waited so long.

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DAVID. It can't be 7:15! That's when Eloise makes coffee. *Her* coffee. The best in the world. There's a window above the stove where the sun peaks in just after dawn. Sometimes when I see her standing there, bathed in the sunlight—she looks like—well, like an angel.

MARTA. Straw into gold?

DAVID. Straw into gold. *(They lock eyes. And just like that, it's decided. David begins to unseal the box. It's hard to open, like a well-wrapped Christmas present. Then he pulls out: an aluminum crossbar, a padded seat, and a tire.)*

MARTA. It's—a bicycle.

DAVID. And here are the pedals.

ANTON. A bicycle. Well. Are you satisfied?

DAVID. They're readying themselves. For what?

ANTON. *(Dangerously close to David.)* Don't you know they're watching? Right this minute? And you come in here, asking questions, opening boxes. That time—that time—has passed.

MARTA. *(Beat.)* I haven't been on a bicycle in—God it must be thirty years. My mother gave me hers, from when she was a girl. I cried and cried because I wanted one with a pink basket—like my friend Heidi. And then it was gone. Stolen, I think.

DAVID. My father taught me to ride one. A bicycle. It was one of the few times he took a real interest. I remember him running close behind me, shouting “Center of gravity! Center of gravity!” Like he was a goddamn physicist.

MARTA. And your mother?

DAVID. Spoiled me terribly.

ANTON. *(Under his breath.)* Precisely the problem.

DAVID. I vowed if I ever had children of my own, I'd split the difference.

MARTA. And did you? Have children of your own?

DAVID. No. The time never seemed right. And now? Now I'm glad I didn't.

MARTA. *(To Anton.)* And you—

ANTON. I've an idea. Why don't you two make yourselves useful?

DAVID. Useful?

ANTON. *(Indicating the opened box.)* Just think what they'll say when they see you've taken the cookie from the cookie jar. *(Marta eyes the upstage wall. David sighs, starts putting pieces back in the box.)* What are you doing?

DAVID. You just said—

ANTON. No. Don't put it back. *Build it.*

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DAVID. Build what?

ANTON. Put it together! Show them that you're forward thinking.

MARTA. Why don't *you* build it?

ANTON. I'm not the one who took it out of the box. *(Beat.)* Just a thought, my friend.

DAVID. Maybe we should all keep our thoughts to ourselves from now on. That would be best.

ANTON. Just a thought. *(And now David can wait no longer. He bursts open the box, hurriedly taking out parts and lining them up. Marta crosses to help him while Anton circles the perimeter. At first it goes well, but David's rushing, on edge. He struggles with two pieces that don't fit together.)*

MARTA. *(Handing David a part. Their hands touch.)* Here. Try this.

ANTON. Don't take all day now.

MARTA. *(Begins to sing, softly at first, but gradually with more feeling.)*

Take this kiss upon the brow
And, in upon parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow—
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream...

DAVID. You've a pretty voice.

MARTA. *(She blushes, continues to help build the bike.)*

Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less *gone*?

DAVID. *(David takes a wheel, attaches it, gives it a good spin.)* "Round about, round about, lo and behold!" *(To Anton.)* What do you think—my friend?

ANTON. Not bad. Not half bad. *(David stand the bicycle upright. He gets on, as if he's mounting a horse. He looks foolish, a grown man on a bike built for a child. But David feels anything but foolish; he feels empowered. He begins to pedal about the room.)*

DAVID. It's true what they say. About riding a bike.

ANTON. Are you crazy?

DAVID. Hell, the whole world's gone mad. Do they really think they can stop the

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clock? This is our time. Our time! *(He pedals more quickly, zigzagging around the room. He's like a cowboy discovering a new frontier.)*

MARTA.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand—

DAVID. *(Their voices overlapping.)* Our time!

MARTA.

O God! Can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?

DAVID. Our time!

MARTA.

Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

(Lost in his newfound freedom, David fails to notice that the Boy has entered downstage, dressed smartly in a white polo, khakis, and a pair of Converse. David brakes, coming within an inch of the boy. Time stands still for a moment.)

BOY. Have you been waiting long?

DAVID. *(Quietly; his swagger gone.)* Yes. A long time. *(The Boy slowly crosses upstage. No one breathes. He picks up the newspaper from the floor and hands it to Anton with a gentle familiarity.)*

BOY. *(To David.)* If you have to wait much longer, maybe you could put the other ones together as well?

DAVID. Of course.

BOY. Good. *(The upstage door swings open; a bright light shines out. The Boy moves toward it.)* Straw into gold?

MARTA. *(After a moment.)* Straw into gold. *(The Boy smiles. The door swings shut behind him. And then: we hear the ticking of the clock as the big hand moves ahead one minute. BLACKOUT.)*

SCENE TWO

The kitchen of David's flat. Earlier that morning. Sun streams through an open window. An old-fashioned coffee pot steams on the stove. In the distance, we hear

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the sound of children's voices. ELOISE enters the kitchen, pulling her hair into a bun. She is rushing this morning, on edge.

ELOISE. David? *(No response. She glances at the clock.)* It's quarter past. *(The coffee pot spurts and sputters. Eloise crosses to the stove and pours a cup, nearly burning her hand.)* Coffee's ready.

DAVID (O.S.). I can't find the paperwork—

ELOISE. You're going to be— *(David rushes in, his tie crooked, his shirt untucked. He pauses at the sight of Eloise, bathed in sunlight.)* Coffee's ready. *(David crosses to her, takes her lovingly in his arms.)* You'll be late.

DAVID. *(Playfully pulling her hair from out of the bun.)* I'll walk extra fast. I'll jog.

ELOISE. David. *(He kisses her, and she gives in to him. A moment later, a bicycle bell rings in the distance. It startles her. Eloise fixes her hair, hands David the cup.)* Careful.

DAVID. *(Crossing to the table.)* I hear they don't even drink coffee.

ELOISE. That attitude is not going to help you. It's not going to help us.

DAVID. People who don't drink coffee? There has to be something wrong with them.

ELOISE. You have to show them that you're ready—

DAVID. *(Pointing to the newspaper on the table.)* —“to begin again”? So they keep saying. We need a plan, not poems and propaganda.

ELOISE. You said that you'd try—

DAVID. Weeks go by without answers. Sitting here, doing absolutely nothing.

ELOISE. Maybe today will change all that.

DAVID. And maybe it won't. I'll be sitting here tomorrow morning reading about how some ten-year-old is going to save the world.

ELOISE. He's fourteen, David.

DAVID. Old enough to know then. It's not working. At least his father had—had a vision!

ELOISE *(Crossing to him; straightening his tie.)* Do you know why I married you?

DAVID. My rugged good looks.

ELOISE. Your passion. You feel everything so deeply.

DAVID. Like carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders.

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ELOISE. It's why we're still here. Why we have another chance. It's what's they want to see from you today, I think.

DAVID. Is that what this is? A lesson in strategy?

ELOISE. That's not what I meant. I want—

DAVID. Look at what's happened to you.

ELOISE. What's happened to me?

DAVID. *You* were the one who got me in at Central to begin with. Pulled all the strings. "We'll change the world, David." And now? Breakfast on the table. The coffee poured! *(Spreading his arms.)* Tell me: is this the future?

ELOISE. They want us to remember. The way we once were.

DAVID. But we need to write new stories too. You of all people should know that.

ELOISE. Is that what you're going to tell them today?

DAVID. Maybe.

ELOISE. Pretend that I'm Him.

DAVID. You're *Him*?

ELOISE. Pretend. Imagine.

DAVID. They—you want us to forget. The progress we made. All we learned.

ELOISE. What did we learn? How to blow each other up?

DAVID. We connected the world.

ELOISE. And never had to leave our homes again.

DAVID. The cures we found? Your mother—suddenly the pain was gone.

ELOISE. I'm Him. Remember?

DAVID. But she was like a new person. *(This gnaws at her, but she signals for him to keep going.)* The truths we discovered?

ELOISE. You didn't discover truths. You just renamed the old ones.

DAVID. This isn't you, Eloise.

ELOISE. Who's Eloise?

DAVID. *(With surprising anger.)* You know damn well— *(Children's voices outside, louder this time. David takes a step back. The game is over. Beat.)*

ELOISE. The paperwork—

DAVID. I couldn't find it.

ELOISE. Can you fill it out again when you arrive?

DAVID. It's nineteen pages. Do you know how annoying it is to fill out nineteen pages, handwritten, in triplicate?

ELOISE. Did you check under your desk?

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DAVID. I looked there. I'll look again. *(He exits to the bedroom.)*

ELOISE. *(Calling to David.)* And my vanity. *(Eloise crosses to the sink, washes out the coffee mug.)* There's a stack of papers underneath—

DAVID (O.S.). Found it! I need a pen.

ELOISE. What? David? It's nearly half-past. *(Eloise places the mug in a rack, turns off the faucet. Her hand is trembling.)* Everything okay?

DAVID (O.S.). Two minutes. *(Eloise peers outside. The coast is clear. Then, surprising even herself, she quickly shuts the window, pulls the shade. She opens a cupboard, moving items until she finds what she's looking for: a cookie jar. Inside: handfuls of keys. As she searches, she keeps one eye on the door. She picks out a particular keyring. Then, just as quickly, she pockets it and has the keys back in the jar and the jar back in the cupboard. When she turns, David is standing in the doorway, paperwork in hand.)*

ELOISE. David. Did you find the—

DAVID. Right where you said it would be. *(He crosses to the table. He's wearing shoes now, and he sits to tie the laces.)*

ELOISE. It's nearly half past.

DAVID. I can't imagine they'll be ready. Why are children always late for everything?

ELOISE. David, I—

DAVID. *(Looking up suddenly.)* You shut the window.

ELOISE. What?

DAVID. The window.

ELOISE. The sun. It was right in my eyes.

DAVID. *(He stares at her peculiarly for moment. Then he crosses to the window, opens it again.)* It's going to be a hot one.

ELOISE. They say we set another record yesterday.

DAVID. Did you sleep?

ELOISE. I was up a few times.

DAVID. You're eating? Tomorrow we could go see that doctor—

ELOISE. David, I've told you. I'm fine. *(He's not quite convinced.)* Good days and bad days. Like everyone else? *(She takes his hand, setting him a bit more at ease.)*

DAVID. You're going to Katherine's this morning?

ELOISE. For a few hours.

DAVID. Be careful. Over by St. Martin's Park—

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ELOISE. I know, I know.

DAVID. And don't let her drag you into doing more gardening. Not on a day like today. *(Eloise crosses her heart. He kisses her tenderly but quickly, then heads for the door.)*

ELOISE. David— *(She's on the verge of saying something more.)* Everything is going to be okay. *(He smiles, exits. Eloise is alone. She pulls the key from her pocket and holds it up. It gleams in the morning sun.)*

SCENE THREE

The other side of the waiting room wall. An artist's desk sits just off center. Pens and brushes. A bowl of apples. Stacks of paperwork. A large reproduction of Bruegel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" hangs on the wall. Seated on a stool is Dake, fidgeting with his feet. Upstage, a GIRL with a clipboard has her back to us. She slams it on the desk.

GIRL. I'm waiting.

DAKE. What?

GIRL. He says you can help us.

DAKE. I hope that's true.

GIRL. Let's start more simply. Fair's fair. How old are you?

DAKE. Twenty...twenty-three.

GIRL. Your birthday?

DAKE. October 3rd.

GIRL. A Libra. *(He stares at her blankly.)* The signs. The stars. My mother says it means something. About who you are. About who you will be.

DAKE. Your mother?

GIRL. Dake. I want you to be comfortable. And for you to be comfortable, I need you to trust me. To trust us. Okay? *(He nods. She takes his hand in hers.)* When I look at you, do you know what I see? Someone we can work with. Count on. *(A half-smile from Dake; he wants to say the right thing. She releases his hand and flips through his file again.)* But I also see you worked at Central for almost two years? Is that right?

DAKE. Three.

GIRL. What?

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DAKE. For almost three years.

GIRL. No university?

DAKE. I went part-time.

GIRL. Degree?

DAKE. About nine credits short.

GIRL. And did you know His father?

DAKE. Of course. Everyone knew him. *(She makes a note in his file.)* I don't mean—

GIRL. Why don't you tell me about Central. Not what you think I want to hear. In your own words. The first thing that comes to—

DAKE. *(Quickly.)* Red overhead. Red overhead. That "C" over the archway. I can still see it. Glowing. *(Tracing a scar on his arm.)* One tiny chip. A simple five-minute procedure, really. And then you were plugged in—a part of it. To whatever you could imagine. Countless realities, one more vivid than the next. *(He stands, begins to wander the room.)* The ground was there, beneath your feet, but now there was another world above. Like a palimpsest.

GIRL. *(Struggling with the word.)* A...palimp-sest?

DAKE. One image on top of another. You might not see them at the same time, but they're both there. They both exist.

GIRL. Until one didn't.

DAKE. Some of us couldn't get out, couldn't turn it off. We don't know why. A ghost in the machine, a glitch in the system—

GIRL. A *glitch*?

DAKE. Everything that happened? That's not what we wanted. We were opening doors. Unlocking possibilities. Those possibilities? They shined so bright.

GIRL. Tell me about the keys.

DAKE. God! A pound of nickel and silver hanging from our belts. Each one unique. The door sensors never worked right. So we kept with the keys. Until the very end.

GIRL. The end?

DAKE. You know the story. He turned it off. He—saved us.

GIRL. What about you? *(Consulting his file again.)* You disappeared for months. No record at all.

DAKE. It was a dark time. I only wish that— *(The door swings upon. We see the profile of the Boy in the doorway.)*

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

BOY. Straw into gold?

MARTA (O.S.). Straw into gold. (*The door slams shut. Dake looks up, fear in his eyes.*)

BOY. Nearly finished?

GIRL. Dake was just telling me about a wish.

BOY. Ah, wishes. Wishes are scary things. You blow out the candles. You watch the star shoot across the sky. You wait and wait, for the day that never comes. And then again, sometimes they do. Come true. That's what's really frightening.

(*Crossing upstage to the painting.*) Do you know Bruegel? The Old Masters?

DAKE. No.

BOY. All that education?

GIRL. Nine credits short of his degree. (*Dake gives her a look.*)

BOY. Icarus then.

DAKE. Wings of feathers and wax. Flew too close to the sun.

BOY. Good. Come here. Closer. Tell me what you see.

DAKE. (*In fits and starts.*) A landscape. The sea. A ship. Sailing. A great wind.

GIRL. Go on.

DAKE. A town. In the distance.

BOY (*Indicating the water.*) Look here.

DAKE. It's—it's a boy. The legs of a boy. Drowning.

BOY. (*Beat. He crosses to the desk.*) Do you think there's hope for us?

DAKE. I have to believe there is.

BOY. And your wish?

DAKE. My wish? (*The Boy nods, takes an apple from the desk.*) To—to begin again. We cast long shadows. We need to look to the past. To find the truth.

BOY. You've done your homework. (*The Boy rises, crosses within an inch of Dake and then downstage. He speaks in a kind of trance or reverie.*) We're back in the Garden now, aren't we? In God's image. Beautiful. Unashamed. And there, all around us. The trees. The fruit. Take a breath. That smell. It makes you want to reach out and grab it. To have it in your hands. To hold on to it forever. (*With heightened intensity.*) The serpent slithers in the trees. His voice vibrates in your head. You can't get it out. He circles you. He's close now. Very close. There. There! You can't fight him off. You can't run. You can't—you can't—you can't—

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

(The boy puts the apple to his mouth, ready to take a bite. Dake rushes over to him, grabs the apple from out of his hand as if it was a grenade ready to detonate. The Boy smiles, eyes wide.)

GIRL. *(Making a note in his file.)* You've done well. *(BLACKOUT.)*

INTERLUDE 1

The Girl takes Dake by the arm and leads him off-stage. Anton and the Boy assume their positions from the Prologue.

BOY. Let's play a game.

ANTON. I'm nearly finished—

BOY. Close your eyes. Tell me the first thing that you remember. From when you were a boy. *Please.*

ANTON. *(He puts down the pencil, closes his eyes, searches for it.)* The Maple tree in our backyard. 140 years old. Can you believe that? Its trunk was outside our bedroom window. Branches like tentacles, reaching to the sky. We'd climb it—my sister and I—until she nearly fell one day. Then father put an end to it. *(He opens his eyes, looks right at the Boy.)* Father. I can still see him. His white t-shirt. I think it was the only thing he ever wore. The smell of gin on his breath. It got him through the worst of everything. At night he'd sit on the porch, stare up at the stars, sing out into space. He was a man's man. But that *voice.*

Do you remember the paths where we met?

Long, long ago, long, long ago

Ah, yes, you told me you'd never forget,

Long, long ago, long, ago

(The Boy stands, drawn to his song.)

Then to all others, my smile you preferred,

Love, when you spoke, gave a charm to each word.

Still my heart treasures the phrases I heard,

Long, long...

BOY. *(Right next to the desk now.)* Pop-Pop.

ANTON. *(Wiping away tears.)* He was always building something. Or taking something apart to put it back together again. Like your father.

BOY. *(Turning away abruptly.)* We agreed not to—

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

ANTON. He wanted the world for you.

BOY. He wanted what he wanted when he wanted it. Like everyone else.

ANTON. And you? What do you want? *(No response.)* A choice. If you don't make a choice— *(Somewhere in the distance there's the sound of a key in a lock. Anton and the Boy do not hear it.)*

KATHERINE (O.S.). Eloise?

ANTON. If you don't make a choice—

KATHERINE (O.S.). Eloise? I'm here. *(KATHERINE enters, goes to the artist's desk, puts down a heavy bag.)*

ANTON. —someone will make one for you. *(Anton takes the Boy by the arm, leads him offstage.)*

SCENE FOUR

We're back in the kitchen of David and Eloise's flat. Katherine has transformed the artist's desk into the kitchen table.

KATHERINE. Sorry I'm late. They're gathering in St. Martin's Park. I had to go the long way. *(She crosses to sinks, looks out the window, pulls the shade.)* Eloise? I brought— *(Still no response. She begins to unpack the bag, pulls out a few apples, then some paperwork. Now she pauses. Something's not right. She crosses to the bedroom door.)* Another hot one today. Are you awake? *(She exits to check on her friend. When she reenters, her face registers concern. Katherine digs deeper into the bag, removing the last item, hidden at the very bottom: a high-tech laptop. When she looks up, she's startled by a figure in the doorway. She stifles a scream.)* You scared me half to death.

ELOISE. I was resting.

KATHERINE. You weren't in bed. *(Eloise crosses to her friend, gives her a long hug.)* I'm a sweaty mess. They're gathering in St. Martin's Park. I had to go—

ELOISE. The long way. I heard you. *(She moves to the sink, pours Katherine a glass of water.)* Here.

KATHERINE. I should be doing that for you. I brought you some—

ELOISE. You know I appreciate it. I really do. But I'm fine. I can fend for myself.

KATHERINE. *(Drinking.)* Your numbers have improved?

ELOISE. Yes.

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

KATHERINE. One day at a time then.

ELOISE. *(Her hands on her stomach.)* Except I'm a ticking clock.

KATHERINE. Work can wait.

ELOISE. But she won't. And then? I won't let that happen. I won't let them take her.

KATHERINE. *Her?* You know for sure?

ELOISE. No. Not for sure. A feeling. I sense it.

KATHERINE. You need to take care of yourself. *(Beat. Eloise crosses to the table, examines the computer.)* It wasn't easy to come by.

ELOISE. I knew you were the person to ask.

KATHERINE. Santiago refurbished it himself. Said it's probably not much use to us without access to Central.

ELOISE. Ah.

KATHERINE. But off the grid. We could get a message out. It may take some time to build— *(Eloise sits, gets down to business. Katherine crosses to the sink, peers behind the shade.)* How long do you think he'll be?

ELOISE. At least until noon. He was running late. And you know the children.

KATHERINE. I'm surprised he went.

ELOISE. It took some convincing.

KATHERINE. *(Hesitantly.)* El. On the walk over here, I was thinking— *(Eloise taps intently on the computer, only half-engaged with their conversation.)* You know what? Never-mind.

ELOISE. You were thinking?

KATHERINE. I shouldn't have said anything.

ELOISE. You *haven't* said anything.

KATHERINE. David. I was thinking. He could be a part of this.

ELOISE. *(Without a moment's hesitation.)* No.

KATHERINE. It comes between you. Like nothing ever has before.

ELOISE. You don't know him like I do.

KATHERINE. I know he loves you. Completely and utterly.

ELOISE. I'm sure you're right.

KATHERINE. And what about *her*? You should tell him. You *have* to tell him.

ELOISE. Now's not the time—

KATHERINE. But David's—

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

ELOISE. (*Slamming her hand on the table.*) David's changed! (*And then she's up on her feet, her frustration palpable.*) After Central? We were all lost. But David's nowhere to be found. He wants to belong, to matter—but he has no idea how.

KATHERINE. He'd be a wonderful father.

ELOISE. Three years ago? I wouldn't have hesitated. But a child, in this world? I don't know—I don't know what he would do.

KATHERINE. You can't know if you don't tell him. You— (*Eloise suddenly seems unsteady. She grabs on to the counter, as if she is going to faint.*) Eloise! (*Katherine moves quickly, catching Eloise and getting her into a chair.*)

ELOISE. I'm fine. It's this heat.

KATHERINE. You need to lie down.

ELOISE. Just sit. Sit and talk to me. What's happening in St. Martin's Park? (*A look from Katherine.*) A gathering, you said?

KATHERINE. Hundreds. On bikes.

ELOISE. The tipping-point.

KATHERINE. It can't be far off.

ELOISE. First-move advantage.

KATHERINE. I'm sorry?

ELOISE. Like in chess. Have you played?

KATHERINE. A long time ago. With my father.

ELOISE. (*Moving items as if playing the game.*) First-move advantage. If both players are equally matched, and if both know strategy, and if neither makes any mistakes along the way, then the player who moves first is more likely to win.

KATHERINE. Statistically speaking. But there are exceptions.

ELOISE. There are always exceptions, Katherine. But I'll play the odds. Every single time.

KATHERINE. And if the gamble is too big?

ELOISE. Why else would you be here?

KATHERINE. Not everything is so calculated.

ELOISE. No?

KATHERINE. I'm here for you.

ELOISE. So that morning you showed up at my door? Desperate to do anything to go back? That was because you cared so much about *me*?

KATHERINE. I don't have some secret strategy, Eloise. Some master plan. I take

ROUND WENT THE WHEEL

it day by day. I can't see four moves ahead like you. I don't know if I want to either. *(Beat. Eloise takes Katherine's hand in hers.)* I'm sorry. I'm—

ELOISE. *(Knowing she's in this alone now.)* I think you're right. I should rest.

KATHERINE. What? Now?

ELOISE. It's this heat.

KATHERINE. I didn't mean to—

ELOISE. An hour maybe.

KATHERINE. Okay. Good. Yes. An hour.

ELOISE. You'll wake me?

KATHERINE. I'll have everything ready.

ELOISE. *(On her exit.)* Katherine? In case I haven't said it: thank you.

KATHERINE. *(She takes a breath, gathers her thoughts. Then she picks up the newspaper.)* "To begin again." *(She turns the page, sighs.)* Another poem. *(She begins to read it aloud.)*

To think of time—of all that retrospection!

To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward!

(She crosses to the window. As she continues to read, the words take on weight.)

Is to-day nothing? Is the beginningless past nothing?

To think that the sun rose in the east! That men and women
were flexible, real, alive! That everything was alive!

(It's as if the poem is speaking directly to her now.)

To think that you and I did not see, feel, think, nor bear our part!

To think that we are now here, and bear our part!

(And then: the computer suddenly begins to buzz, flash, ring. An alarm sounds in the distance, almost like an air raid siren.) Eloise? *(She rushes to the doorway. The ringing grows louder. There's no time; she needs to make it stop. Now. She opens the laptop. A bright, cold light fills the room.)* Eloise?! *(The noise becomes deafening. BLACKOUT.)*

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