

# FEEDING THE MOONFISH

BARBARA WIECHMANN

FEEDING THE MOONFISH was first performed at the Nat Horne Theatre, New York City, as part of the About Face Theatre Company's Julyfest, July 1988. Directed by Tony Kelly; set design by Diane Forbes; costume design by Tricia Sarnataro; light design by Dan Kelley; sound design by Tony Kelly; stage managed by Rona Bern; with the following cast:

EDEN Mary B. Ward  
MARTIN Christopher Rath

### Characters

MARTIN, midtwenties  
EDEN, about sixteen

VOICES OF THE MOONFISH, to be played by two or more actresses of varying ages and vocal ranges

### Setting

The play takes place on a dock on a saltwater lake in southern Florida.

*Darkness. In the darkness we hear two or three long whistles and then a series of overlapping voices.*

### VOICES:

Martin  
Martin  
Martin

What are you thinking about now Martin?  
Did you have a long night at work?

~~Are you tired?~~

We're so happy you're home.

### MARTIN:

Can I see him?  
I want to see him.

### VOICES:

Talk to us first.  
Close your eyes first.

### MARTIN:

I'll close them for you.

### VOICES:

Tell us we're beautiful.

### MARTIN:

I want to see him first.

### VOICES:

Talk to us first.

~~Tell us we're beautiful.~~

### MARTIN:

You're beautiful.  
You're so beautiful.

### VOICES:

He'll be here soon Martin.

### MARTIN:

~~I'm dreaming about flying.  
In planes.~~

~~I want to fly so bad that as soon as I hit the mattress, whammo some stewardess is strapping me in.  
Get it?~~

~~Soon as my head hits the pillow I'm taxiing down some runway,  
I'm taking off—  
Into the blue.~~

~~Sky so deep you could just tumble into it and never fall.~~

~~Just float around.~~

~~I'm up there.~~

~~In blue heaven.~~

~~Movies, brunettes, cocktail almonds, the whole bit, the life.  
One long cool glass of water.~~

~~Flying, zooming through all that space.~~

~~All that blue distance.~~

~~All that space.~~

~~All that distance.~~

*Italian notes / beautiful*

I want to leave here.  
I want to leave this place.

VOICES:  
Where are you?

MARTIN:  
Home.

VOICES:  
What surrounds you?

MARTIN:  
Trees.  
The dark.

VOICES:  
The air.

~~MARTIN:  
The air.~~

~~VOICES:  
What's it like?~~

~~MARTIN:  
It's  
grey.~~

VOICES:  
Hard to breathe.

MARTIN:  
Bring him to me.

VOICES:  
Cool yourself.  
Put your hand in the water.

~~VOICES:  
Cool yourself.  
Put your hand in the water.~~

~~VOICES:  
Cool yourself.  
Put your hand in the water.~~

~~MARTIN:  
Cool yourself.~~

VOICES:  
Reach farther.  
Put your face to the water.

MARTIN:  
Bring him to me.

VOICES:  
Face to the water.  
We'll show him to you.

MARTIN:  
If I put my face to the water,  
I can see pieces of him  
like white ivory  
and pieces of him tangled in the coral  
like gardens.  
I can feel  
back of my neck  
currents  
like wind.

~~VOICES & MARTIN:  
Now it is night  
We will walk to the end of the pier  
and watch the moonfish feed.  
Because it is night  
and peering deep into wells of bottle blackness  
we will see them.  
(Eden enters from behind Martin's table.)~~

EDEN: Who are you talking to? (Martin freezes.) Who are you talk-  
ing to?

MARTIN: How long have you been standing there?  
EDEN: Not long.

MARTIN: You shouldn't spy on people.

EDEN: I wasn't spying. I just woke up and I heard you.

MARTIN: How long you been standing there?

EDEN: I told you.

MARTIN: Where'd you come from?

EDEN: Your car.

MARTIN: You were in my car?  
EDEN: I stowed away. I been sleeping under that sleeping bag you  
got all balled up there in the back.

MARTIN: You were in my car.  
EDEN: Ever since you left the restaurant.



EDEN: Sure. She was an accomplice to my dad's murder. She helped my mom kill him.

MARTIN: She did.

EDEN: Yeah.

MARTIN: How?

EDEN: What?

MARTIN: How'd they do it?

EDEN: Frying pans. They beat him to death.

MARTIN: That's not funny. *(She just stares at him.)* Look, there must be some place you go home to—I'll take you home O.K.?

EDEN: I want to stay here with you.

MARTIN: You can't stay here.

EDEN: Why not?

MARTIN: It ain't safe.

EDEN: Why not?

MARTIN: You'd probably roll off the dock in your sleep and the barracuda'd get you.

EDEN: They got barracuda here too?

MARTIN: Sure.

EDEN: ~~Fucking Florida—I hate this place.~~

MARTIN: It's all right, you can hate. It's just a place. It can't hate you back.

EDEN: You know all the fish by names. *(She moves closer to him.)* How come—how come you're smart like that?

MARTIN: Knowing names don't make you smart.

EDEN: You think there are forces between us?

MARTIN: No.

EDEN: What if there were? What if we was being zapped right now by outside forces—fades or microwaves or something.

MARTIN: We aren't.

EDEN: You don't think so?

MARTIN: No.

EDEN: ~~Maybe I do. *(She attempts to kiss him.)*~~

MARTIN: ~~Get off. You're just lonely. You're just fucking lonely.~~

EDEN: It ain't a crime being lonely you know. You treat it like it was a disease. I ain't a disease. You think I'm a disease.

MARTIN: I don't think you're anything. *(She gets up to go.)*

EDEN: ~~What you're lonely. I bet you're lonely too. So you should have to treat me like some piece of shit.~~

MARTIN: ~~I wish you were.~~

EDEN: ~~What you're lonely. I bet you're lonely too. So you should have to treat me like some piece of shit.~~

MARTIN: ~~You don't have to do anything.~~

EDEN: I got my pride too you know. I'll just be on my way. I'll just go get swallowed up into the dark like some kind of free-floating disease.

MARTIN: You don't have to leave.

EDEN: I'll do what I want.

MARTIN: Don't leave.

EDEN: I'll do what I want.

MARTIN: Don't be stupid—you can't walk around out there alone.

EDEN: So I got killed. I know what I'm doing. *(She exits.)*

MARTIN: Hey. Hey. Hey! *(He looks after her.)*

~~FUCK.~~

I can't see anything.

I can't see you.

VOICES:

Imagine what it looks like

MARTIN:

I can't.

VOICES:

Picture it and you will see it.

It's all pictures Martin.

MARTIN:

I can't see anything.

VOICES:

Picture the water.

Ink dark, green

bottle black.

MARTIN:

Something could happen to her.

VOICES:

Nothing can happen.

MARTIN:

She can't get

pen.

If I

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

pen.

~~Which I really lived in space.  
In space you don't weigh anything.  
You could float around. Float all over the place.  
You could do somersaults in the air.~~

~~MARTIN: You used to be able to see all this crap floating by.  
EDEN: What do you think?  
MARTIN: Garbage an hubcaps. Bloated dead things.  
EDEN: What kind of dead things?  
MARTIN: Fish.  
EDEN: Bloated dead fish.  
MARTIN: Yeah.  
EDEN: Oh.  
MARTIN: The moonfish were dying. The living things were all dying.  
EDEN: How come?  
MARTIN: The living things were all dying. But not anymore. The moonfish are making a comeback.  
EDEN: That's nice. (Pause.) You like them fish don't you?  
MARTIN: This place used to be fantastic. There was a marina. Men would come here and fish.  
EDEN: They fished for the moonfish? They ate the moonfish?  
MARTIN: Sharks. They fished for sharks.  
EDEN: Sharks.  
MARTIN: They hunted em. Took their boats through the channel to the ocean and hunted em. They had contests. I watched them haul em in off their boats and dump em on the dock. Hammerheads, tigers, gray nurses. They slaughtered em.  
EDEN: Yeah?  
MARTIN: They dumped em in piles and left em. Bellies up, hooks in their mouths, piled to the sun.  
EDEN: That's it? What else?  
MARTIN: Nothing.  
EDEN: That's it?  
MARTIN: That's it. They slaughtered em.  
EDEN: Well, they was killers.  
MARTIN: It was cruel.  
EDEN: I'm so sleepy.  
MARTIN: What?  
EDEN: I said I'm real sleepy.  
MARTIN: So sleep. I don't care what you do.  
EDEN: Aren't you sleepy too?  
MARTIN: No.~~

~~EDEN (pause): What do you think people do in prison?  
MARTIN: What?  
EDEN: Do you think my mom's bringing an O.K. time behind bars? I brought her some needles to make an afghan with but they took away the needles. They said they was lethal weapons. How she ain't too bored. She don't know what to do without something in her hands.  
MARTIN: Your mom's really in jail?  
EDEN: I told you.  
MARTIN: She beat your dad to death.  
EDEN: She tried. My grandma's the one that killed him. That dealt the actual death blow.  
MARTIN: Your grandma killed him?  
EDEN: She sure did.  
MARTIN: Why'd she do it?  
EDEN: She couldn't stand him no more.  
MARTIN: That's it?  
EDEN: No. He used to beat my mom on a semi-regular basis, an this time she was fighting for her life—right? He was choking her.  
MARTIN: She had no choice. She was makin the best of the situation. She found her only opportunity, grabbed the waffle iron with her one free hand, and beamed him with it. Then she called Gram to help her come finish.  
MARTIN: He beat you too?  
EDEN: Naah. He couldn't beat me—he weren't my blood dad. Just her he beat.  
MARTIN: Don't it bother you?  
EDEN: I don't know what to think. You must be a moron or something.  
MARTIN: You in homeroom talking to Tasha Paritees about how Kimmi Wiggins ripped off two full shopping bags a stuff at Sears and went right past the security guards without getting caught. Two bags. Tons of jewelry, these cool earrings. Just dropped the rack right in—four bikinis, a princess phone, two Cheryl Tiegs jogging outfits, and she's rich—she don't need the stuff—but you gotta admit it—that's what I was telling Tasha—you gotta admit it—she did something.  
MARTIN: You don't stress anything whether you're rich or not.  
EDEN: I didn't say it was me—God.  
MARTIN: Do you steal?  
EDEN: Don't interrupt if you wanna hear. So I'm in homeroom talking to Tasha about this big ripoff and this announcement coming over the P.A. "Eden Battaglione please report to the front office. Eden Battaglione please report to the front office."~~

...these reports to the front office." Like that—so right on my  
 the entire student body of my homeroom goes ape-shit cause they  
 think it's got to do with me taking these pills in the lav—only  
 they weren't pills they was only Tylenol—so I get to the office  
 and them ugly hairdos are laughing at me kinda funny and then  
 they lay it on me—"Your dad's been bashed to death by a waste  
 iron, Eden—Your ma's been hauled away to some mental prison,  
 and your grandma's nearly croaked herself in the process of the  
 operation. Now you've got permission only to get back to your  
 room."

Wouldn't it upset you? I gotta be questioned by the police for  
 days, I gotta miss astronomy club for three weeks, my friends  
 think I'm a psycho, and in the long run all I get is my ass hauled  
 down here to this swampland to live with my fat aunt Inez and  
 her Siamese cats and work in a steak house. Wouldn't it upset  
 you? I mean wouldn't it?

MARTIN: You're not a psycho.

EDEN: I know that. You got a joint?

MARTIN: You don't need a joint. You're a healthy girl, you don't  
 need that stuff.

EDEN: You don't know anything. You don't know me. You don't  
 know what I might need.

MARTIN: Jesus calm down, you're all worked up.

EDEN: Of course I'm worked up. Why shouldn't I be? I bust my  
 ass to make one single friend and all I get is shutting doors. He  
 don't wanna talk, he don't wanna listen, he just wants to watch  
 these weird fish all night.

MARTIN: I been listening to you. I'm listening.

EDEN: No. Why should you listen to me. Why should you under-  
 stand. There's no rational way to account for the disgusting things  
 I've seen in my life.

MARTIN: Yeah?

EDEN: What?

MARTIN: You can be a drag you know that? Maybe you're just  
 young but even if you ain't lying you ain't the only person's ever  
 seen disgusting things go on in this world, and if you are lying,  
 shit, I could make up stories same as you that'd make your head  
 bleed into little pieces. So your mom's a little high-strung—I could  
 tell you that I didn't even  
 really want to be a doctor.

EDEN: I could tell you I once worked bachelor parties in order  
 to put food on the table.

**MY MOM'S**

MARTIN: I could tell you a brick fell on her head and split her skull  
 wide open one day as she was breast-feeding me—

EDEN: I could tell you my grandma was a schizophrenic, I could  
 tell you my father was a junkie and made me his love slave—

MARTIN: I could tell you my father slit his throat—what do you  
 want me to do? What's the matter?

EDEN: Nothing.

MARTIN: What?

EDEN: Nothing.

MARTIN: What is it?

~~MARTIN: You're not a psycho.~~

~~MARTIN: Look, I'm sorry I ain't been nice to you. I guess I'm just  
 not very nice, you know? You know, I can be an asshole.~~

~~EDEN: Bullshit. That's shit.~~

~~MARTIN: Don't swear. Come on. Come on. Come here. Aren't you  
 sleepy? You wanna sleep here or something? (She shakes her head.)~~

~~Here blow your nose. Don't get all snorty on me. You wanna eat  
 something? I got a ham sandwich in the glove compartment.~~

~~EDEN: I already ate.~~

~~MARTIN: What?~~

~~EDEN: Burt's birthday cake.~~

~~MARTIN: What, back at the restaurant? You didn't eat any dinner.  
 You didn't eat anything healthy. Don't give me that shit. That's  
 disgusting.~~

~~EDEN: I'm not disgusting.~~

~~MARTIN: Grow up, I seen you. You let those guys up there—horny  
 old ~~asses~~—you let them pinch your butt and feed you cake and  
 beer.~~

~~EDEN: God, you're such a preacher.~~

~~MARTIN: Look, I'm sorry, you shouldn't wear those little cut-off  
 shorts. Your butt hangs out, you know that? I mean don't take  
 this wrong but it's just a plain come-on.~~

~~EDEN: Well, what do you want me to wear, overalls? It's hot in the  
 kitchen.~~

~~MARTIN: I work there too.~~

~~EDEN: Look, you don't have to go playing saint on me or nothing.  
 I ain't your kid or some ugly little sister of yours that can't get a  
 date, and anyway you shouldn't talk. I heard about you too you  
 know.~~

~~MARTIN: What about me?~~

~~EDEN: What you done to girls. What you done to that girl.~~

~~MARTIN: Which girl? What is it you hear? Who tells you?~~

~~EDEN: You're no saint. I hear things.~~

~~MARTIN: What are you doing here then? If that's what you hear?~~

~~EDEN: I ain't afraid of you.  
 MARTIN: What are you doing here. You come here and shove these  
 goddamn lies at me.~~

~~EDEN: They ain't lies. Not one thing I sold you is a lie.~~

~~MARTIN: What are you even talking about?~~

EDEN: I ain't a slut, you know.

MARTIN: What does that have to do with anything?

EDEN: You're so fucking cool ain't you? And I'll swear if I want, I hear things. You thought she was some dumb slut so it didn't matter none. You thought she had no brains.

MARTIN: What are you even talking about?

EDEN: I hear. I hear. You come out here at night and some girl you think is scum gets drunk and you just let her wander around by herself cause she bugs you. You just let her wander around all miserable and throwing up—

MARTIN: People make up goddamn stories.

EDEN: All miserable and throwing up and you could care less she gets hurt out here on this rusty old piece of shit dock. You could give a shit she falls in, and can't see and can't swim and screams and screams and panics and you don't even come help her.

MARTIN: You don't know anything.

EDEN: You could care less. You never even bothered, you just let her drown.

MARTIN: Shut up. Shut up.

EDEN: You coulda saved her but you let her drown. You watched her drown I'll bet.

MARTIN: Shut up. *(He moves to strike Eden, but stops himself before his fist makes contact.)* I never touched you.

EDEN *(pause)*: I know. I know that. It's O.K. You think I'm a slut or something but you know something, it doesn't matter to me. You know that? I don't care you think that.

MARTIN: I don't think you're anything.

~~EDEN: What are you talking about? What are you talking about? What are you talking about?~~

~~MARTIN: What are you talking about?~~

~~EDEN: He hit her. He could hit her again and again, and she'd be screaming and throwing furniture and heavy objects and shit, but she could take it. He could do anything and it was O.K. because she loved him so much and she knew how much he loved her cause she was the only one that could take him. You understand? She was special. He didn't do that stuff to no one else. He could fool around on the side but in the long run it was her. She weren't just nothing to him. She was it. She was his thing end.~~

~~MARTIN: She killed him.~~

~~EDEN: Sure. Jealousy. She had to have him for herself completely.~~

~~MARTIN: I thought you said she was fighting for her life.~~

~~EDEN: Conveniently. She woulda killed him anyway sooner or~~

~~hear. Just to fuck, have him. She loved him so much. To this day his memory is sacred to her. She's got a framed eight-by-ten of him hanging on the wall of her cell in the slammer. See, their bodies was made to be with each other. That's what I think. Gravy was pulling em to each other. Forces was pulling em—just like them fish—only they could feel emotional pain in their minds too so it was worse. They was real helpless. They couldn't change nothing though. They couldn't change see. That's why it don't matter what you think of me—~~

~~MARTIN: I don't even know you.~~

~~EDEN: It don't matter. There ain't nothing you could say or do or think that would change anything so what's to be afraid of right? I'm not afraid of you. It don't matter what you done to some girl. You could burn people's furniture cause you didn't like the color, set fire to your neighbor's front lawn and watch the grass grizzle up and the flames reach the front door, you could kill someone—you could never speak another word to me in your life, and it wouldn't matter. I'd still care for you.~~

~~MARTIN: You know, I think you're a little sick.~~

~~EDEN: That's O.K. too, cause I'm like you. You could do anything in your life that you ever regretted but we'd still be here on this dock right now—and it's nice huh? That breeze blowing and all—it's getting cool. That nice breeze, huh? You got such a beautiful face. I like you so much.~~

~~MARTIN: You think it's beautiful here?~~

~~EDEN: Yeah, it's beautiful. Like a picture.~~

~~MARTIN: You like it here.~~

~~EDEN: I like it here with you. To be here with you.~~

~~MARTIN: I like it here with you.~~

~~EDEN: Close your eyes. You could just close your eyes, Martin.~~

~~MARTIN: Maybe. Maybe that'd be O.K. Tell me something.~~

~~EDEN: What?~~

~~MARTIN: What's it like where you're from?~~

~~EDEN: It's nice. It's all right. It ain't so shitty. You ain't aware of your own body so much cause you ain't sweating all the time, right. It's nice.~~

~~MARTIN: I should go there. I never been out of this state. I should go places.~~

~~EDEN: Why don't you take me places then. Why don't you kidnap me?~~

~~MARTIN: You already kidnapped yourself. Sometimes I think I'll just go though—I'll get out of here. I'll just do it. But I never do. I can't. I come here. These pictures flash in my mind. I get these pictures. I see this place so beautiful. So perfect. I see it~~





they're kissing the dock with their mouths, feeding on the life there, mingling with the dark water, and I watch till it's like I'm being hypnotized and then I feel him lift me up and up and his arms rock me and his voice in my ear, he tells me, he says to me:

VOICES:

~~We will walk to the edge  
of the pier and watch  
the moonfish feed  
because it's bright  
and peering deep into  
wells of bottle blackness  
we will see them  
bits of floodlight pouring like  
the moonfish  
will feed~~

sucking into the light  
in secret they must think  
but we will watch  
their ghostly orbs  
kiss the barnacled piles of the dock  
because it is night  
because that's what we do  
because so much is moved  
by the pull of the moon.

EDEN: You dad tells you this?

MARTIN: He lifts me up and up and his kiss goes warm on my cheek, and my forehead and I see the silver of the fish and silver down around the throat, and starting at his ear he slices down, through the planks and onto the moonfish—staining, covering, choking them. His hand goes limp, the razor falls, he crumbles to my feet and noiseless I push the body empty and light into the lake. Waves over him. Billows of blood and water. The downward spiral of flesh, of water. The sleep of water. Then it happens. They come for him. One by one gliding into his pool of blood, testing him with their mouths, each bite making him theirs, pulling him finally down with them into the darkness. They own him now.

EDEN: They own him now.

MARTIN: He was so lonely for her. After she left him. He was so lonely. He couldn't sleep in their bedroom anymore. I'd find him in the morning in a ball on the living room floor. That's where

he slept. A grown man. Cause he couldn't stand the loneliness.  
EDEN: I wouldn't leave you.

MARTIN: He never hit her though. He never touched her, all them times they fought. He couldn't hurt anything. Not a bug, not a lousy fish. Only himself. He could do that.

EDEN: I would stay with you.

MARTIN: I guess it wasn't in him.

EDEN: Brush my hair for me.

MARTIN (*brushes her hair*): Sometimes I get this feeling, I'm walking down some road, this thing comes over me.

EDEN: You got such a nice face.

~~someone—some guy, some woman—they've got nothing to do  
with my life, I see them and I think "I could take him."  
EDEN: I like you so much.  
MARTIN: I could kill that guy over there. I'd like to kill that asshole.  
EDEN: You could do anything in your life that you ever regretted.  
MARTIN: It's not a rational thing. I never killed anyone, but I think  
I could do it.  
EDEN: Anything that you ever regretted.  
MARTIN: I could do it. Maybe I'd like to.  
EDEN: I'd still care for you.  
MARTIN: You listen to me tell you this. You listen to me, and you  
just sit there like it was nothing. Like it was natural.  
EDEN: Tell me I'm beautiful. (*She places his hand on her hair, he  
begins to stroke it.*)  
MARTIN: You just don't understand anything.  
EDEN: Tell me I'm beautiful. (*She takes his hand from her hair and  
places it on her breast.*)  
MARTIN: I like it was natural.  
EDEN: Tell me.~~

MARTIN: You're beautiful. You're so beautiful.

(*He continues to stroke her throat as the lights fade.*)