



Pam Muñoz Ryan

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Readers' Theatre Script for *Nacho and Lolita*

For Four Voices

Nacho
Lolita/Narrator Three
Narrator One
Narrator Two

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NARRATOR THREE

Nacho and Lolita by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Once, when the two Californias ran *alta y baja*, high and low along the sea of the Pacific, a mysterious bird landed on the branch of a mesquite tree in the valley of San Juan.

NARRATOR TWO

His name was Nacho and he was a pitacoche.

NARRATOR ONE

From his perch on the edge of the churchyard, Nacho could see the panorama. Acres of dirt rolled into thirsty riverbeds. Nothing grew in the fields. Even the leaves of the mesquite tree seemed to match the adobe of the Mission San Juan Capistrano.

NACHO

What a dismal place. Everything seems to blend into the same brown landscape . . .except for me!

NARRATOR THREE



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With a little too much pride, he spread his feathers, preening and fluffing as he waited for the day to fade. Then, at the moment that the sun closed its eye, Nacho trumpeted the passing of the light with a song, his trill like a mysterious wind.

NACHO

OO . . . EEE . . . AH . . . OO . . . EEE . . . YOU . . .

NARRATOR THREE

A crowd gathered to admire his evening ritual.

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NARRATOR TWO

He is so beautiful and his call is so haunting. He must be a spirit from the past.

NARRATOR ONE

(mysteriously)

Or a prophet of the future.

NARRATOR TWO

Only Nacho knew the truth. He was the only pitacochi for thousands of miles and hundreds of years. His brilliance sometimes brought him attention. But what good was it when he had no other bird with whom to share his joy?



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NARRATOR ONE

The busy churchyard was a pleasant change from Nacho's lonesome travels. He watched people prepare for the March fest of St. Joseph.

NARRATOR THREE

He listened to the talk about the return of *las golandrinas*, the swallows, and the more he heard, the more curious he became.

NARRATOR ONE

It is a miracle. Every year they cross the great waters together to come back to this very place, arriving on the feast day. Then, when the days grow shorter, they leave again for another world, always together.

NARRATOR THREE

Una familia fantástica!

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NACHO

How romantic. The swallows are everything I am not. They are small and strong. I am big and bound to the land, unable to fly long distances without resting. They are a fantastic family flying together over the ocean. I don't belong to anyone.

NARRATOR THREE



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Intrigued by the people's preparations and caught up in their enthusiasm, Nacho wondered what he could do to help?

NACHO

I have nothing to offer except my songs.

NARRATOR THREE

On the feast day, Nacho woke to the clanging of bells. People ran into the churchyard and pointed skyward.

ALL (Except Nacho)

Las golandrinás!

NARRATOR THREE

A scout swallow circled above. Then another, followed by a flight of swallows trailing in the sky. All morning they came, swooping down toward the mission and landing in the eaves.

NARRATOR TWO

One small swallow chose the belfry of the chapel to make her nest. All day, she flew back and forth to the riverbed, gathering bits of mud and twigs.

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NARRATOR ONE



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Each time she passed Nacho, she peeked at him. Nacho noticed her hurried glances.

NACHO

Does she notice my glorious feathers? Or my regal stature? I am colorful and noble. Or is it something else? Can she see my pitiful and lonely spirit?

NARRATOR TWO

As the small swallow made her last trip of the day, the sun said good-night and Nacho began *un arrullo*, a lullaby.

NARRATOR ONE

Every swallow leaned forward to hear the magnificent serenade. The small one stopped on the ox cart and listened.

NACHO

OO . . . EEE . . . AH . . . OO . . . EEE . . . YOU . . .

NARRATOR THREE

When Nacho finished his song, he plucked one of his feathers and flew to the ox cart. As was his destiny, once a colorful feather was spent, a gray feather grew back in its place.

NARRATOR ONE

But Nacho didn't mind. When the swallow took it in her own beak, by the mystery of the ages, it became a blue hibiscus.



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NACHO

What is your name?

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LOLITA

Lolita!

NARRATOR TWO

Her cheeks blushed the faintest pink.

NACHO

Low-lee-tahhhh. Low-lee-tahhhh.

NARRATOR ONE

Nacho's heart filled with notes that he had never dreamed of singing.

NARRATOR TWO

Days passed and Nacho cheerfully busied himself among the swallows. He carried bits of dry grass and dollops of mud to their nests, especially Lolita's.

NARRATOR ONE

After the speckled eggs appeared, he used his wide wings to protect them, especially Lolita's.



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NARRATOR TWO

When the chicks were born, he searched for beetles, flies and spiders, and delivered them to each home, especially Lolita's

LOLITA

Thank you, Nacho. You are splendid. You are magnificent!

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NARRATOR TWO

Nacho's bright feathers fluffed and his heart felt as cozy as the every-warming breezes.

NARRATOR ONE

Every evening, his lullaby echoed throughout the mission.

NARRATOR TWO

By summertime, Lolita and her chicks were always by Nacho's side. Nacho's heart was so filled with affection and purpose that he could not remember a time before he came to the mission.

NARRATOR ONE

Together, he and Lolita watched the chicks fledge and fly. As the days grew longer, they all stayed in the fields until sunset, foraging for worms and bugs.

NARRATOR TWO



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Then one day, a September gust brought a message with the wind and a hint of uneasiness settle on the swallows.

LOLITA

I'm afraid we must go soon. And now there is talk that we will never come back here again. The water is drying up. We need mud to make our nests. We need flowers and trees to attract insects so there will be enough food. Without the river to guide us, we will miss this spot next year.

NARRATOR ONE

Nacho panicked. He'd forgotten that Lolita would have to leave. Now, she might never return!

NACHO

Stay with me!

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LOLITA

I can't. It's too cold here in the winter. I must migrate or I will die. You come with me. You would love it in the south Americas. Rivers overflow the banks, flowers decorate the fields . . .(wistfully) the sunsets are the color of papayas.

NACHO

I can't fly that far. I am too big.



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LOLITA

I've talked to the others. There is a way. Carry this branch in your talons. Fly as long as you can. When you grow tired, drop the branch into the water and rest on it. Then wait for your strength to return so you can fly again.

NARRATOR TWO

Nacho practiced every day until the October morning when the scout swallows left and the others prepared to follow.

NARRATOR ONE

Could he really go with them? Just the chance made hi feel as if he could fly forever.

NARRATOR TWO

At last the time had come to leave the mission. Nacho and Lolita perched on a cliff's edge, facing the vast ocean. Nacho gripped the branch. The breeze lifted him and he followed Lolita over the rough open sea.

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NARRATOR ONE

But after a very short distance, Nacho was exhausted. He dropped the branch and landed on it just as he'd practiced. Lolita circled above, waiting for him.

NARRATOR TWO



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Before Nacho was ready to fly again, choppy waves rocked him from his perch.

NARRATOR ONE

He splashed and struggled and began to sink.

LOLITA

Nacho! Nacho!

NARRATOR TWO

He slipped farther and farther beneath the swells.

NARRATOR ONE

A thousand swallows turned back, flew down and lifted Nacho to safety.

NARRATOR TWO

On the cliff top, gasping for air, he knew the truth.

NACHO

A big pitacochi and a small swallow are not meant to be together. Go. We will meet in our dreams.

NARRATOR ONE

When Lolita disappeared from sight, his heart felt as barren as the land.

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NARRATOR TWO

That night as the sun slid away, Nacho's song ached with sadness.

NACHO

LOW – LEEEE-TAHHHH. I LOVVVVE YOUUUUU.

NARRATOR ONE

Winter came with heavy fog.

NARRATOR TWO

Nacho sat sentry in the mesquite tree and remembered the happy times with *la familia fantastica*.

NARRATOR ONE

He thought about the first time he saw Lolita and how he had given her one of his feathers. He looked at the gray feather that had grown back in its place.

NACHO

I would give all of my colorful feathers if the swallows and my Lolita would come back. There must be a way to guarantee their return.

NARRATOR TWO



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Nacho flew to the belfry every day. The blue hibiscus had taken root among the mud nests and even though the flowers were gone, the strong vine wove its way through the tower, exactly as Lolita had done to his heart.

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NACHO

When spring poked its head into February, the vine held buds that promised blossoms. All that from my one feather!

NARRATOR ONE

Suddenly, Nacho knew what he must do.

NARRATOR TWO

In March, when the people again began their preparations for the feast of St. Joseph, Nacho began to prepare, too.

NARRATOR ONE

He flew to the fields, plucked his orange and yellow feathers and as fast as he planted them . .

NACHO

. . . the acres bloomed with poppies and mustard.

NARRATOR ONE



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He left a trail of blue feathers in the riverbed and it overflowed, filling the small creeks and marshes. He pushed green feathers into the soil . . .

NACHO

. . . until palms danced and orange trees flourished.

NARRATOR ONE

He tucked feathers over arches and balconies and draperies of bougainvillea appeared.

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NARRATOR TWO

As Nacho worked, he wondered if the swallows would find their way. Determined, he planted feathers in every patch of earth in the churchyard until a splendor burst forth. Nacho used every feather except one.

NARRATOR ONE

When the hallowed bells rang as if they'd never rung before, Nacho searched the sky for Lolita. A million thoughts raced through his mind.

NACHO

What if she doesn't recognize me? What if she doesn't like me know that I'm as drab as a mud hen?



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NARRATOR TWO

Nacho watched the scout swallows dive around the mission in a frenzy of joy and excitement. One after another they came, followed by flurries of swallows. He turned his head toward the heavens and waited.

NACHO

And waited . . .

LOLITA

Nacho! Nacho!

NARRATOR TWO

The distant sound of his name made his heart fly.

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NARRATOR ONE

Nacho searched the skies. There!

NACHO

LOW-LEEEEEEE-TAHHHHH!!!

NARRATOR TWO



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It was as if they'd been together for thousands of miles and hundreds of years.

NACHO
(sadly)

I no longer have my beautiful colors.

LOLITA

To me, you will always be splendid.

NARRATOR ONE

Together, they flew toward the river to gather mud and twigs to make a nest.

NARRATOR TWO

Before the day faded, Nacho plucked the last bright feather from his tail and tossed it toward the westward clouds.

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LOLITA



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Then the moment the sun closed it's eye, Nacho heralded the passing of the day with a concert . . . against a papaya sky.

NACHO

LOW-LEE-TAHHHH. . . I - LOVVVE-YOUUUU.

End of Scene