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*This play is dedicated to Gail Herman,  
my friend and creative North Star.*

## Cast of Characters

THE SEA

*A chorus that sometimes divides into halves:*

TIDES

WAVES

*Three members of The Sea:*

EBB TIDE

DEEP CURRENT

ROGUE WAVE

THE SAILOR

NORAH

UNA

ISEULT

DECKHAND 1

DECKHAND 2

JOHN

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*We Are the Sea* premiered at Socorro High School, Socorro, Texas, on February 27, 2020. It was directed by Troy Herbort and Molly Alvarado. The assistant director was Diamante Martinez.

ROGUE WAVE . . . . . Christopher Mendoza  
EBB TIDE . . . . . Katya Gonzalez  
DEEP CURRENT . . . . . Angel Macias  
SEA . . . . . Olivia Ortega  
SEA . . . . . Juan Estrada  
UNA and SEA . . . . . Aurora Avalos  
ISEULT and SEA . . . . . Alize Riojas  
NORAH and SEA . . . . . Briana Ramirez  
SAILOR and SEA . . . . . Alan Aguirre  
PERSON 1 and SEA . . . . . David Jaquez  
PERSON 2 and SEA . . . . . Isaiah Rocha  
JOHN and SEA . . . . . Carlos Huereca  
Stage Manager . . . . . Alonzo Lozano  
Sound . . . . . Jacob Flores  
Front of House Lights . . . . . Hailey Esparza  
Props . . . . . Julieta Flores-Hernandez  
Backstage Lights . . . . . Jacklyn Estrada  
Alternate . . . . . Leonardo Sandoval

# WE ARE THE SEA

by Laura Lundgren Smith

*(Lights up on raised platform that gives the suggestion of the prow of a ship. On stage level, the chorus, dressed in blue and green flowing garments, moves together in a rhythmic motion, left and right, forward and back. Directors are urged to draw on their own creativity to depict the movement of THE SEA. When noted, THE SEA is split into halves: TIDES and WAVES.)*

**TIDES.** They are coming!

**WAVES.** The ships of death.

**TIDES.** They are coming!

**WAVES.** The ships of doom.

**THE SEA.** *(In whispers here and there, growing to a crescendo:)* The coffin ships!

**TIDES.** Can you feel the hunger?

**WAVES.** Can you feel the sickness?

**THE SEA.** The coffin ships.

**TIDES.** Come from Ireland.

**THE SEA.** Coffin ships from Ireland.

**WAVES.** Heaving with the hungry.

**TIDES.** Weighted with the weary.

**WAVES.** Heavy with the sick.

**THE SEA.** Sailing, sailing for salvation.

**WAVES.** Filled with broken spirits.

**TIDES.** Fraught with the grieving.

**WAVES.** Freightened with the dying.

**THE SEA.** Coffin ships.

**TIDES.** Last vessels of the dead.

**THE SEA.** *(Raising their arms:)* We will receive them.

**TIDES.** We will welcome their bodies.

**WAVES.** We will hold their stories deep.

**TIDES.** Receive them into our vast blue.

**THE SEA.** For we are . . .

**TIDES.** We are . . .

**WAVES.** We are . . .

**THE SEA.** We are the sea.

*(Several people gather on the deck of the ship. Two women struggle with the body of a third. Both are crying.)*

**TIDES.** Mother, mother, why are you weeping?

**EBB TIDE.** Can you feel the knife of the rib?

**ROGUE WAVE.** Does the hunger scream?

*(THE SEA howls mournfully. The cry is vaguely mirrored by the women.)*

**THE SAILOR.** Hurry up, get that corpse in the water and clear my deck.

**NORAH.** We cannot even pause to mourn; we cannot stop to grieve.

**UNA.** *(Coughing:)* That man cares nothing for our grief.

**NORAH.** Una, you are so ill. Go back down. Go back and care for your baby.

**UNA.** You have been so kind to us, I can manage.

**NORAH.** You are shivering. Please. Someone else will help.

**UNA.** I do not think they will. You are as alone as me and Maeve, now. I will stand with you.

**NORAH.** *(Taking UNA's hand:)* We have each other, then.

**UNA.** *(Struggling with the body, she turns in exasperation to THE SAILOR:)* Can you help us, for pity's sake?

**THE SAILOR.** I don't touch the corpses of ya, darlin'.

**NORAH.** She is dead. What harm can she bring you?

**THE SAILOR.** You are filthy, the lot of ya. The hold smells like a charnel house or worse. And sick, to a man. Just look at you. Sweating with a fever, awful fierce, ain't ya? And her *(gestures at ISEULT's body)*, the starvin' dropsy got her, sure as I'm stood here.

**NORAH.** What if we cannot manage? Will you help us then?

**THE SAILOR.** I wouldn't touch her, would I? I'd get me the boat hook and heave her over the side with the sharp end. Don't imagine you'd like that much, now would ya?

*(UNA gasps.)*

**NORAH.** (*Angrily:*) Move out of the way, then, and hold your peace.

**THE SAILOR.** (*Stands firm, chuckling for a moment, then with an exaggerated bow and flourish:*) After you, luv.

*(The women continue to struggle with the body.)*

Hurry up, now, Cap'n wants you back below, and I got a bottle waitin'. Wail up to your god, make the heathen sign (*crosses himself in an exaggerated fashion*) or whatever you do, like he cares.

**NORAH.** Have you no shred of decency?

*(THE SAILOR laughs and spits at NORAH's feet.)*

**UNA.** (*Looking out over the water:*) Another soul lost. Another one cast into the sea. We mourn her and say a thousand farewells to her just as we did to Ireland, the auld sod, our home.

*(She coughs.)*

**NORAH.** We will never again see home for distance. She will never again see it for death. Farewell, farewell.

*(She waves at the distance, weeping.)*

**THE SAILOR.** (*Becoming angry:*) Hurry it up, now. Put it in the water already. (*Mockingly:*) Into the deep, we commend this body, all the plaster saints, on and on.

**NORAH.** Her name was Iseult. She was my sister.

**THE SAILOR.** Well, there's no help for her now.

**UNA.** Into God's hands we commend her soul, for Resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ in his glorious majesty to judge the world, and the sea shall give up her dead.

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Looks up at the ship and crosses his arms, defiantly:*) No one leaves us.

**EBB TIDE.** You cannot stop His hand.

**NORAH and ROGUE WAVE.** Where is His hand?

**NORAH.** Does He take the thin hand of the poor?

**DEEP CURRENT.** Cast out of their country and into the deeps of ours.

**EBB TIDE.** No country. No home.

**UNA.** Amen.

**NORAH.** Amen.

**THE SEA.** *(All stretch up their arms to take the body:)* We receive this body.

*(NORAH and UNA hand the body off as if dropping it into the sea.)*

**NORAH.** *(Weeping:)* Bear her away. Bear her away. Hungry no more.

*(THE SEA takes her body, gently rocks it, moves it amongst them, almost as a ritual, then stands her up, moving around her like a current. EBB TIDE kneels and takes her hands.)*

**ISEULT.** *(Confused and a bit dazed:)* Who are you?

**EBB TIDE.** The sea.

**ISEULT.** How do you speak?

**EBB TIDE.** My voice is the sound of the sun on water, the sound of the sand as the earth moves.

**ISEULT.** I am no more?

**EBB TIDE.** No.

**ISEULT.** Shouldn't I be weeping?

**ROGUE WAVE.** *(Sullenly:)* The sea is made of tears.

**ISEULT.** The others?

**EBB TIDE.** Sailing on.

**DEEP CURRENT.** And now it's time.

**THE SEA.** It's time. It's time.

**ISEULT.** It's time?

**EBB TIDE.** To tell your story.

*(DEEP CURRENT steps forward, and the others move out of the way, as if for an elder. THE SEA shifts and hums softly under his lines.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** *How did you come to our depths? How do you find yourself here? How came you to be on the ship? Why the journey? What destination?*

*(She hesitates, but EBB TIDE clasps her hands encouragingly, gently urging her forward. ISEULT drops her head in shame.)*

**ISEULT.** We ate the songbirds. *(She reaches up.)* We ate them. *(Her hand goes slowly to her mouth.)* We swallowed their songs.

*(NORAH appears stage left, carrying a bag. A change in lighting can be used to denote the shift to the past.)*

**NORAH.** I caught two birds and found an egg in a nest!

**ISEULT.** (*Looking into the bag:*) Thank the saints.

**NORAH.** (*Removing a small body from the bag:*) Greenfinches.

*(She strokes it with her thumb.)*

**ISEULT.** I heard one singing this morning. (*She drops her head in shame.*) Perhaps this very one.

**NORAH.** We have to eat, Iseult.

**ISEULT.** It is so little food. It seems a sin.

**NORAH.** (*Taking ISEULT by the shoulders:*) Look at the state of you, sister. How is your heart? Shuddering still?

**ISEULT.** Never you mind.

*(ISEULT puts her hand over her heart and NORAH freezes. ISEULT steps out and speaks to THE SEA.)*

**ISEULT.** The hunger, after a while, becomes a specter. Your belly no longer cries out. Your body slowly feasts on itself, eating your heart down to crumbs, until it jumps in your chest. You feel yourself fading away.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Death by degrees.

**EBB TIDE.** How was this allowed?

**DEEP CURRENT.** Was there no help?

**ISEULT.** No help for us. Poor farmers, living on borrowed land, send us away, let us starve— it mattered not. An Irish problem, the English said, even as they ruled over us.

**NORAH.** (*Unfreezing, moving toward ISEULT:*) I searched all the way to the sea.

*(THE SEA shifts.)*

**ISEULT.** And the far neighbors?

**NORAH.** I went past the Brenners'. They have the green mouths, mother and child. Eating the turf. Eating the grass. God in His Heaven.

*(She makes the sign of the cross.)*

**ISEULT.** I knew it wouldn't be long, once Charlie passed on.

**NORAH.** It will not be long for them now.

**ISEULT.** It will not be long for us either, now, and no mistake.

**NORAH.** The Donnellys and the McMahans are bound for the ships, sailing for Canada.

**ISEULT.** I fear we must sail or die as well.

**NORAH.** Would Williams offer us free passage? Some landlords have done.

**ISEULT.** No, and we've no money for a ticket. And look (*she points*); there is a crop of oats, and we will be allowed none of it, while we make nettle soup and eat songbirds.

**NORAH.** Monday is the harvest. Imagine a bowl of porridge.

*(She grips her stomach.)*

**ISEULT.** No justice. Those laden carts will roll right past this house, and all we can do is feel the pain in our bellies as they pass.

**NORAH.** I will go in the night and take what we need. Enough for us. They will never know.

**ISEULT.** No! The soldiers guard the granaries. And Williams would see you hang.

**NORAH.** Hang or starve. Do we have a choice?

**ISEULT.** Dare the hangman, or die, mouths stained green.

*(ISEULT freezes. NORAH appears to sneak around, looking around nervously, a bag slung over her shoulder. She is suddenly grabbed by two chorus members and dragged out of sight.)*

**ISEULT.** Dare the hangman. She was caught, and given two choices: leave Ireland or hang.

**EBB TIDE.** We are sorry for your misfortune.

**ISEULT.** Before we left, I found Esther O'Brien and her little one, Mary, in their old garden patch. Mary had covered her mother's body with a little soil, as well as a six-year-old could. She lay down next to her mother, and sleep took her, and then death, her little mouth still green from eating the grass. God save all here, I said, as if He were listening. And as I stood, and looked upon the corpses, and thought of my sister, nearly hanged because we starved, my soul left Ireland, although my body still stood there. I had eaten the songbirds, and the song of this place, the song of my home, died inside me. I would beg the fare, I would sell myself, we would sail away. And so, we did. But I could not outrun the hunger. An gorta mór. Yes, my body was weak, every rib a blade, but it was my heart that starved. It was my heart. (*She covers her heart with her hands.*) Farewell, sister. Farewell, Ireland, a thousand farewells, island of Saint Patrick. Farewell, farewell.

*(She cries.)*

**EBB TIDE.** Sister, sister, why are you weeping?

**ROGUE WAVE.** The knife of hunger cuts.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Grief has made a feast of the heart.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Your story joins the sea.

**EBB TIDE.** Your story joins the sea.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Your story joins the sea. Your tears join the sea.

**THE SEA.** You join the sea.

*(They surround her, and she is borne off.)*

You join the sea. You join the sea. You join the sea.

*(THE SEA swirls and freezes. The lights come up on the ship. NORAH enters and approaches THE SAILOR, who stands on the deck, a cup in his hands.)*

**NORAH.** Sir, sir, please?

**THE SAILOR.** *(Annoyed:)* What do you want? You should be below.

**NORAH.** Please, can you help me?

**THE SAILOR.** And why would I do that?

**NORAH.** There is a woman with a sick baby below. Her name is Una, and—

**THE SAILOR.** What use do I have for names, now? What do I care? Dirty Irish, all's I need to know.

**NORAH.** She's very ill, and the baby. Could we get a little more water, please?

**THE SAILOR.** You mean like this here? *(He lifts his cup.)*

**NORAH.** *(Starts toward him:)* Yes, she burns with fever—

**THE SAILOR.** *(Holds up a hand:)* No. This? *(He lifts the cup.)* This is mine.

*(He drinks, then tosses the rest over the side.)*

**NORAH.** Why . . .

**THE SAILOR.** Had her ration for the day, has she?

**NORAH.** Yes, but—

**THE SAILOR.** No, then. Go away.

**NORAH.** Please. She is very sick.

**THE SAILOR.** All of yous got somethin', innit? Fever, bad wame, hungry, somethin'.

**NORAH.** Please, the baby is very ill.

**THE SAILOR.** Do I care? She brought the runt on the ship. Not my worry.

**NORAH.** Do you not have a family?

**THE SAILOR.** No family. Never have, never will. Me mam brought me aboard a ship at four year old. Sick she was, they said, died on the voyage; corpse thrown over the side same as half you lot.

**NORAH.** Then you know the feel of it.

**THE SAILOR.** The feel of it? The feel? It feels like me mam ought to have stayed in her own land. That's how it feels. She left me an orphan, workhouse sold me, eight year old, to a captain for a ship's boy. At sea ever since.

**NORAH.** What was her land?

**THE SAILOR.** (*Agitated:*) Don't know, do I? Don't care.

**NORAH.** Where was she going?

**THE SAILOR.** Stowed away, alls I know. No thought for me.

**NORAH.** Looking for a better life?

**THE SAILOR.** Better life? (*Scoffs.*) She left me to the sailors, and they left me to the workhouse, girl, do you know it? People howl in the night, they howl, the workhouse howl, from the hunger, from the cold, worked to death. You don't know the suffering of that place.

**NORAH.** Una and that child are suffering, burning with the fever. The child may die.

**THE SAILOR.** Then at least it will miss the workhouse.

**NORAH.** A little water, please. Just that small kindness.

**THE SAILOR.** You listen! I work hard for me bread, work hard. I asks nobody for nothin'. And you lot, with no home, hands out everywhere you go. Nobody owes you nothin'.

*(He pushes NORAH's shoulder, knocking her back a few steps.)*

You ought to go back where you came from.

**NORAH.** You do not think we would?

**THE SAILOR.** No, I think you lot just take what's the easy way.

**NORAH.** Nothing about this is easy, sir. Look about you. We suffer and die. We die, just like your ma.

**THE SAILOR.** My ma was weak and stole passage to boot. Deserved her lot!

**NORAH.** And did *you*?

**THE SAILOR.** Go back below! Go! Now!

**NORAH.** Please, sir, just a cup of water.

**THE SAILOR.** Give them your ration!

**NORAH.** I did. I did. It's gone.

**THE SAILOR.** Then grab a bucket. (*He gestures in a wide circle.*) There's water all around. The sea won't miss a drop.

(*THE SEA shifts. THE SAILOR exits. NORAH shakes her head, looks up beseechingly at the sky, then exits. THE SEA shifts again and the lights change to denote some passage of time.*)

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*With disgust:*) There are others coming.

**DEEP CURRENT.** There are others dying.

**EBB TIDE.** I can feel them, yes. This ship is truly a ship of death.

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Addressing the ship:*) Sail on. We do not want your dead.

**DEEP CURRENT.** It is an honor to accept the dead.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Sickness, starvation, and then cast up on us like so much waste.

**EBB TIDE.** We are the memory keepers. We are the holders of stories.

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Scoffing:*) What use have we for human stories?

**DEEP CURRENT.** It is a sacred duty.

**EBB TIDE.** They are nationless, homeless, unwanted by all. Here, they are treasured.

**ROGUE WAVE.** They belong in the earth, not in our deeps.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Even you are of them, salt and water, a part of everything.

**ROGUE WAVE.** I will never accept it.

**DEEP CURRENT.** You have no choice. They give and we must receive.

**EBB TIDE.** There is another. And another.

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Walking away angrily:*) It never ends.

**THE SEA.** (*Gathering:*) The ship of the dead. The ship of the dead.

**DEEP CURRENT.** We will receive them.

**EBB TIDE.** A ship of pestilence and hunger.

**THE SEA.** Coffin ships.

**DEEP CURRENT.** It's happening. It's happening. It's happening again.

*(THE SEA echoes each "happening" very softly. People appear on the deck.)*

**DECKHAND 1.** It's a right shame, this.

**DECKHAND 2.** Ain't they all?

**DECKHAND 1.** A babe is worse than. Never had a chance, wee girl.

**DECKHAND 2.** Saw 'em on the gangplank, I did. The three of 'em. Knew when I saw 'em they got the fever. Faces pale as the mainsail.

**DECKHAND 1.** Captain still let 'em board?

**DECKHAND 2.** Them Irish, they survive Liverpool, the cap'n, he just wants his money. He keeps 'em down the hold, they all die, he's not bothered, innit? Still gets his pounds and pence, off the plank at the end or over the side halfway there.

**DECKHAND 1.** The da, he still below?

**DECKHAND 2.** No, died before we sailed, will never leave Liverpool.

**DECKHAND 1.** Liverpool. God never smiled on it.

**DECKHAND 2.** Aye. Never did.

**DECKHAND 1.** Mate told me they found a family, in one of them cellars they rent to the Irish, all of 'em dead by the dad's hand. Now that's despair, that is.

**DECKHAND 2.** It is. Plain despair. Poor sufferin' dogs. Treat 'em like vermin, they do.

**DECKHAND 1.** Runnin' for their lives, starvin' wee children weepin' and Canada don't want 'em, America, she don't want 'em.

**DECKHAND 2.** Nobody wants your suffering, that's a fact.

**DECKHAND 1.** Like this babe, dead like its ma, and the cause? Now that's a cryin' shame.

**DECKHAND 2.** It is, never an easy thing, this. (*Shakes head.*) Let's get on.

**DECKHAND 1.** At least mother and child go in together.

**DECKHAND 2.** Aye.

*(NORAH rushes up to them.)*

**NORAH.** Wait, wait, please. Please. Wait.

**DECKHAND 1.** Just doing my duty, miss—they said she be alone and all.

**NORAH.** She isn't alone. I'm here. I'm here.

**DECKHAND 2.** Are you her family then?

**NORAH.** No, I . . . I'm only her friend.

**DECKHAND 2.** Well, that's someone for her then, innit?

**NORAH.** I left her, I only left her for a moment.

**DECKHAND 1.** She was quite ill and all.

**NORAH.** I only left her, and the baby—they needed water, they needed water.

**DECKHAND 2.** Nowt you could do, miss.

**NORAH.** *(Angrily:)* He would not give us any! He would not give us a drop, and now look! And the baby. They said the baby . . . Oh . . . oh, the poor little thing . . .

**DECKHAND 1.** 'Tis a pity, and no mistake.

**NORAH.** *(Crying:)* Maeve, Maeve.

**DECKHAND 2.** Go on below, miss. You'll not wanna see this.

**NORAH.** No. No! I will not leave her again.

**DECKHAND 1.** All right then. All right.

**DECKHAND 2.** Should we say a word?

*(They look at NORAH expectantly.)*

**NORAH.** *(Shakes her head after a moment:)* Words can't help them.

*(They move away from NORAH, taking the body. NORAH stands and watches.)*

**DECKHAND 2.** You know the best thing about the sea?

**DECKHAND 1.** What?

**DECKHAND 2.** She never says no.

*(THE SEA raise their arms. He hands the mother to THE SEA, and then a small bundle, a baby, to the waiting arms of EBB TIDE.)*

**DECKHAND 2.** Farewell, Irish. May the sea love you more than the land.

**DECKHAND 1.** God be with you.

*(They gather NORAH and exit.)*

*(THE SEA swirls around UNA and takes her body, gently rocks it, moves it amongst them, almost as a ritual, then stands her up, moving around her like a current. EBB TIDE goes to one knee and cradles the child.)*

**UNA.** Who are you?

**DEEP CURRENT.** The sea. And you?

**UNA.** My name is Una.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Welcome.

**UNA.** Where is my daughter?

**EBB TIDE.** *(Approaches and kneels before her:)* She is with me.

**UNA.** I am no more?

**EBB TIDE.** No.

**UNA.** *(Reaches out to the bundle:)* And Maeve?

*(EBB TIDE shakes his head and gently gives UNA the bundle.)*

Shouldn't I be weeping?

**EBB TIDE.** The sea is made of tears.

**UNA.** The others?

**EBB TIDE.** Sailing on.

**DEEP CURRENT.** And now it's time.

**THE SEA.** It's time. It's time.

**UNA.** It's time?

**EBB TIDE.** To tell your story.

*(DEEP CURRENT steps forward.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** How did you come to our depths? How do you find yourself here? How came you to be on the ship? Why the journey? What destination?

**UNA.** A place for her. A place with all she can eat, and sunshine. No illness, not at anyone's mercy.

**ROGUE WAVE.** We are *all* at someone's mercy.

**DEEP CURRENT.** You have lost much.

**UNA.** My husband. I lost him. He is lost to me. The fever. The fever.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Spin your story to the sea. We are listening.

**UNA.** We were happy once. Before the hunger and the sickness.

*(A change in lighting denotes a shift to the past. JOHN enters, runs to UNA and wraps his arms around her, spins her around. He sets her down, then freezes.)*

**JOHN.**

*(Singing a verse from "Carrickfergus":)*

But the sea is wide and I cannot  
swim over

And neither have I the wings to fly  
I wish I had a handsome boatsman  
To ferry me over, my love and I.

**THE SEA.**

*(Singing the first line softly along with JOHN:)*

But the sea is wide and I cannot  
swim over

**UNA.** She loves it when you sing. Soothes her straightaway.

*(She lays the baby down.)*

**JOHN.** Ah, but do you love it, too?

**UNA.** You know I do! You only truly won my heart when I heard you sing.

**JOHN.** And me, a poor boy, swept up the prettiest girl in County Clare.

**UNA.** *(Laughs:)* And me a poor farm girl, swept up by John Gallagher, the handsomest man in Ballycotton.

**JOHN.** Handsome? I've a face like pig iron.

**UNA.** *(Laughing:)* Stop now. Go on with ya.

**JOHN.** This mug could drive spikes through a plank.

**UNA.** *(Laughing:)* John!

**JOHN.** But never mind, for despite my looks we now have the most beautiful little girl in all the world, and no mistake.

**UNA.** And to think you might have run off with Lucy McGee.

**JOHN.** Never! Lucy, with the pox and the voice like a donkey?

**UNA.** *(Laughs:)* Stop, she never.

**JOHN.** She did! She could call the donkeys in from the fields. *(Calls out:)* HAW! HAW!!

**UNA.** *(Laughing:)* Shh, shh, you'll wake Maeve.

*(JOHN grabs UNA and kisses her.)*

**JOHN.** Oh, Una, I'll die for the love of you both, I will.

**UNA.** And us, you, John Gallagher.

*(She hugs him. The scene freezes and UNA steps out, returning to the present.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** What troubles you, child?

**UNA.** The happiness didn't last.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Does it ever?

**UNA.** Food got scarcer and scarcer, and the foreman of the farm came and said "Right, you're out! Gather your things and go!" And just like that, we had no home and no work. I was scared, us with a wee one, and no food, and little money. And John said . . .

**JOHN.** There's only one thing for it. We will sail to America.

**UNA.** America?

**JOHN.** A chance for us there. A chance for her.

**UNA.** To get to the ship to America, we had first to go to Liverpool. And sights there to shame the Devil. Our kinsmen on every lane, begging for help; sick, starving, piled cheek to jowl in cellars. And on every corner confidence men and tricksters, slick as oil to part you from your coin. Preying on the desperate, fattening themselves like ticks on the misfortune of others. And if they couldn't talk your money out of you, they'd just knock you on the head and take it. And there we were, stuck in, like bait on a hook, just waiting to be swallowed up.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Misery feeding upon misery. So human.

**UNA.** I'm frightened, John.

**JOHN.** All will be well, love.

**UNA.** *(To DEEP CURRENT:)* But it wasn't. For if you kept your wits and your money, and held on to your tickets, and didn't starve, it was the sickness that took you. And the sickness was everywhere, in every corner, in every breath of air. Typhus.

The fever.

**JOHN.** *(Over the sounds of the baby crying:)* I am burning alive, Una.

**UNA.** I'm here, I'm here, shh, now.

**JOHN.** The baby?

**UNA.** She is sick but no worse.

**JOHN.** I hear her crying, even in my dreams.

**UNA.** Do you think you can walk? Can you lean on me? We must go. The ship is boarding.

**JOHN.** You are sick yourself; how can you bear the weight of me? *(He reaches out a hand to touch her forehead, and she turns away.)* You're burning, Una.

**UNA.** I will be fine. We must get on that ship, John. Do you hear me?

**JOHN.** We will. I swear it. I just need rest. I just need . . .

**UNA.** Shh, shh. It's all right. It's all right.

**JOHN.** I won't die in Liverpool. I won't die here.

**UNA.** Come, we must go now. We mustn't let on we are ill.

*(She picks up the baby, crooks it in one arm, and tries to help JOHN to his feet. He struggles to rise, but does, and they begin walking.)*

**EBB TIDE.** How brave of you, to face such a voyage and be unwell.

**UNA.** Bravery had naught to do with it. Out of money we were, we had no choice.

**EBB TIDE.** Still brave enough to move forward, not crumble in despair.

**UNA.** Despair? We were only drowning in it.

*(THE SEA shifts and swirls.)*

In Liverpool, we were the . . .

*(Various insults are shouted at JOHN and UNA as they limp past: "Dirty shants! Greenmouths! Pot lickers! Taking from us all! Go back to Ireland, filthy narrow backs!")*

**UNA.** They'd no idea, Ireland was our fondest dream. Home. To go home. But we boarded that ship, for her. For Maeve.

*(Someone calls "All aboard!")*

Stand up tall now, love.

*(She puts her arm through JOHN's.)*

We're almost there, and you can have a rest.

*(JOHN stumbles, and UNA nearly falls with him. ISEULT and NORAH walk up behind them. JOHN sinks a bit, and NORAH goes to help.)*

**NORAH.** Here, let us help.

**UNA.** Can you hold Maeve, please?

**NORAH.** Yes.

*(She takes the infant.)*

**ISEULT.** *(Taking JOHN's other arm:)* Steady, not long until you can sit.

*(The four walk forward a bit.)*

Shall I ask for water? He burns with fever.

**UNA.** No, no, please, they mustn't notice.

*(JOHN slumps over onto UNA's shoulder.)*

They might send us off.

*(JOHN stumbles and nearly falls.)*

**ISEULT.** Only a bit farther.

*(She puts her arm around his shoulders as well.)*

**NORAH.** *(She has walked a bit ahead, gently bouncing the baby. She turns to look back:)* Shh, look, look, your da is coming. He's coming.

*(They walk a bit further, and she and ISEULT help JOHN sit. UNA sits, and he leans against her shoulder.)*

**UNA.** We made it, my heart. We are on our way.

**JOHN.** *(Singing hoarsely:)* Ah, but I'm sick now and my days are numbered. *(Coughing and shivering:)* Come all me young men and lay me down.

**UNA.** Shh, be still, be still.

**JOHN.** *(Weakly:)* Come all me young men and lay me down.

**UNA.** You'll be well, you will! You will!

**JOHN.** The sea is wide. The sea is wide . . .

**UNA.** John, John, shh. Shh.

**JOHN.** Mama?

**UNA.** No, it's me, it's Una.

**JOHN.** Mama! *(Tries to get up, shouts, then falls.)* I can see it! I can see it there!

**UNA.** John!

**JOHN.** Can you see it? Can you see it?

**UNA.** What, love? Can I see what?

**JOHN.** The shore. I see it. I see it. I see . . . I . . .

*(Reaches up, then goes limp against UNA.)*

**UNA.** John? (*He slumps against her.*) John? No. Oh, no, John. No. Don't go. Don't leave me, please. Don't leave me. Please. Oh, please.

(*THE SEA hums under this.*)

**DEEP CURRENT.** His song has ended.

(*THE SEA stops humming abruptly.*)

**EBB TIDE.** We are sorry.

(*THE SAILOR and DECKHAND 1 enter. THE SAILOR notices JOHN, nudges him with his toe, and bends to look at him.*)

**THE SAILOR.** Didn't make it, did ya, Irish? And you? (*He nudges UNA with his toe.*) You don't look a measure better. You got tickets? (*He snatches them from her.*) Money spent, die here, die there, all the same to me. But him, he must go. Ticket's no good for a corpse. Get him off my deck.

(*He nods and DECKHAND 1 grabs JOHN by the arms and begins to drag him off.*)

**ISEULT.** (*Moving forward to put her hand on UNA's arm, then to THE SAILOR:*) Can she not have a moment?

(*DECKHAND 1 hesitates, looking to the SAILOR for direction.*)

**THE SAILOR.** (*Annoyed:*) What did I say? Get him off my ship!

**UNA.** (*Angry:*) No! No!

(*She moves to follow him, but NORAH steps forward and takes her arm. She struggles and lunges at THE SAILOR.*)

**THE SAILOR.** Take one more step, colleen, and I'll throw you and your runt off this vessel.

**UNA.** (*Hesitating:*) Damn you. Damn your empty heart.

(*Struggling against NORAH's grasp.*)

**NORAH.** Una, listen. Listen! You must sail. For Maeve. For her.

(*UNA collapses into NORAH's arms, sobbing. DECKHAND 1 pulls JOHN by the arms over an obstacle.*)

**THE SAILOR.** Back to Liverpool with ya, mate, and good riddance.

**ISEULT.** Must you be so rough?

**DECKHAND 1.** (*Dipping his head:*) Sorry, ma'am. Sorry. No disrespect.

**THE SAILOR.** (*Laughs.*) Not like that stiff minds.

**ISEULT.** Can you not respect the dead?

**THE SAILOR.** You lot? You're all dead. You just haven't the sense to see.

**UNA.** (*Crying and turning to speak to THE SEA:*) Oh, but I did see. I saw John, my love, my life, being taken from me. They were so rough with him, like a piece of rubbish. Off the ship, and we could not follow. We watched until we could no longer see him.

*(She walks to NORAH, takes the baby. DECKHAND 1 drags JOHN off. NORAH and ISEULT watch and gently touch UNA on the shoulder. UNA takes the baby and walks to where DECKHAND 1 took JOHN off, raises one hand as if to wave, puts baby on her shoulder, begins to cry.)*

**UNA.** We'll see him again, one day. He'll sing to us again, love. You'll see.

*(ISEULT and NORAH exit.)*

**ROGUE WAVE.** Enough! What about you? What was your death?

**EBB TIDE.** It is her journey. A journey has many steps.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Continue, please. What became of you and your child?

*(THE SAILOR appears on the deck, pointing and shouting.)*

**THE SAILOR.** Get your flea-ridden carcasses below decks, the lot of ya, and you'll stay in the hold, you will. I'm sick of the sight of you. You stink, you foul the air. Get below and stay there, go, now!

**UNA.** There was rough weather and sickness, and the crew lost their patience with the poor lot of us and locked us in the hold for days. I burned with fever, sicker than I had thought. And Maeve burned. All I could do was hold her and pray it would pass. I held her. (*She covers her mouth, struggling to continue.*) But I grew weak, and slept too long, and . . .

**EBB TIDE.** You could do no more.

**DEEP CURRENT.** You were likewise ill.

**UNA.** The hold—the hold was full of rats, great grey things with eyes that shone in the dark.

**EBB TIDE.** Rats?

**UNA.** Hungry they were, and bold. They would nip at you in your sleep. Your nose, your ears. Not afraid. Not afraid and so very hungry. I was so ill. I burned inside like a furnace, and I saw things in the shadows, and my bones like splinters, and sleep, sleep in the dark hold, rocking, rocking, on the waves. Burning sleep like death.

And the rats, in the blackness, waiting, waiting. And I slept, with Maeve next to me. I slept, dying, and the rats. The rats came. They came with their sharp, sharp teeth. And they found her. They found my baby. They found my wee girl. They found her, they found her and—

*(She screams, loud and long, falling to her knees, ending in a ragged sob.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** So much sorrow.

**THE SEA.** *(Murmuring together:)* Sorrow.

**EBB TIDE.** So much sorrow.

**THE SEA.** Sorrow.

**ROGUE WAVE.** All they know is sorrow, in the end.

**EBB TIDE.** *(Lifting her gently to her feet:)* Let it flow out among us.

**DEEP CURRENT.** We mourn with you, to our depths.

**EBB TIDE.** Let it flow.

**ROGUE WAVE.** *(Sharply:)* We are flooded by it.

**EBB TIDE.** Give each of us a drop, until all the drops in the ocean carry it away.

*(THE SEA surrounds her, hands outstretched.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** The current will bear it away.

**EBB TIDE.** The tides will bear it away.

**DEEP CURRENT.** So much sorrow.

**THE SEA.** Sorrow.

**EBB TIDE.** Let it pass.

**THE SEA.** *(Softly:)* Let it pass. Let it pass.

**UNA.** What will I be without it?

**DEEP CURRENT.** You will be free.

**THE SEA.** Free.

*(They surround her, handling her gently, bearing her and her baby off.)*

**THE SEA.** Free. Free.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Why must we accept their sorrow, their suffering, their broken vessels? I do not want their grief. I do not want them.

**ROGUE WAVE.** We are at peace here, the moon leads us here and there, we are warmed by the sun. Let them go to land, where they belong.

**DEEP CURRENT.** We are part of their journey.

**ROGUE WAVE.** And what benefit for us? What do we receive except sadness?

**DEEP CURRENT.** We receive their stories. We are vast, we are vast and we listen. We listen and we remember.

**ROGUE WAVE.** I care not for their stories. Misfortune, starvation. Thrown to us, cold and alone.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Yes, alone. And we will be their last embrace.

**EBB TIDE.** We are all connected. We are the sum of what flows through their veins. We are they; they are we. They are only changing form.

*(THE SEA changes position.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** Music of all that

**THE SEA and DEEP CURRENT.** IS

**DEEP CURRENT.** intoned into

**THE SEA and DEEP CURRENT.** WAS.

*(THE SEA turn their backs.)*

**EBB TIDE.** It is the song of the sea.

**ROGUE WAVE.** I will not sing it. Let it fall silent. They can search for their own salvation.

**EBB TIDE.** Wait, do you hear it? Do you feel it?

**DEEP CURRENT.** There is unrest aboard the vessel.

**EBB TIDE.** There is great unrest.

**THE SEA.** Unrest.

*(They all gather around the ship, looking up. THE SAILOR chases NORAH across the deck, catches her by the arm.)*

**THE SAILOR.** Stop! Nowhere to run, and when I catch you, you'll be sorry! Irish maggot!

**ROGUE WAVE.** *(Running to edge of ship, pointing up:)* Him again! Always him! Always! I grow weary of his wickedness.

**THE SAILOR.** Got you, slattern!

**NORAH.** How could you, you—

**THE SAILOR.** Shut up! Quiet!

*(He shakes her, looking around.)*

**NORAH.** I saw you. I saw you. You were—

**THE SAILOR.** You ain't seen a damn thing, you Irish slag.

**NORAH.** I did! With my own eyes! *You're* the devil, and I'll see you hang!

**THE SAILOR.** I won't hang. But you'll drown.

*(He drags her over to the side of the ship. She begins to scream, but he clamps his hand over her mouth. He forces her onto the railing.)*

**THE SAILOR.** I'll die on this ship, you're right, but it won't be at the end of a rope, and it won't be on account of you! Look down at your grave, girl.

**NORAH.** *(NORAH straightens up, suddenly defiant:)* How many of the dead down there can speak your name?

*(THE SEA quietly whispers different names.)*

**THE SAILOR.** Go and ask them.

*(He pushes her off the railing, and she falls forward into the arms of THE SEA, struggling and then surfacing.)*

**NORAH.** Help, please!

**THE SAILOR.** There is no help for you. God doesn't want you.

*(THE SAILOR turns and walks away.)*

*(THE SEA begins humming softly at first, but gradually growing in intensity, and NORAH continues to struggle.)*

**NORAH.** No! No! Help me, someone please! Help!

*(She sinks and then surfaces, crying out again.)*

Help! Help! Help me!

*(She flails wildly, trying to strike members of THE SEA, struggling, breathless.)*

**NORAH.** I won't die like this! I won't!

*(She sinks again.)*

**EBB TIDE.** *(Very softly:)* There is no refuge.

*(THE SEA whispers "refuge.")*

**DEEP CURRENT.** There is no island.

*(THE SEA whispers "island.")*

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Looks at NORAH, then up at the ship, fists clenched:*)  
You are forsaken.

(*THE SEA whispers "forsaken."*)

**NORAH.** (*Surfacing again:*) No! NO! Stop! NO!

(*She continues to fight against THE SEA.*)

NO! NO! I want to go home! Let me go home . . . Please. Please.

(*The last is a moan of defeat. THE SEA starts to whisper "Shhhhh."*  
*She dips below the surface again but struggles up one last time.*)

**NORAH.** Please. Please. Please. No. No.

(*Growing weaker, she struggles less and sinks a final time.*)

**EBB TIDE.** Lay your burden down.

**NORAH.** I'm afraid.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Fear not.

**NORAH.** No. The ship —

**ROGUE WAVE.** The ship is sailing on.

**NORAH.** No . . .

**DEEP CURRENT.** Come away.

(*THE SEA whispers "come away."*)

**NORAH.** Please . . .

(*THE SEA again whispers "come away."*)

**ROGUE WAVE.** It is ending.

**NORAH.** Please.

**EBB TIDE.** (*Pulling her gently down:*) Fall into our arms.

(*THE SEA whispers "fall."* *NORAH spasms in one final reach for the surface, then relaxes into EBB TIDE's arms.*)

**NORAH.** I am no more?

**EBB TIDE.** You are no more.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Your time has ended.

**NORAH.** (*Rushing at ROGUE WAVE:*) You've killed me! You've taken my life!

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Pointing up at the ship:*) No, it was him. That creature of hate.

**EBB TIDE.** We were merely the instrument, not the musician.

**DEEP CURRENT.** The sea is vast. The sea is deep.

**EBB TIDE.** We could not save you.

**NORAH.** *(Sobbing:)* Why not? Why not?

**ROGUE WAVE.** We do not save, only salvage.

**DEEP CURRENT.** You are crying.

**NORAH.** The sea is full of tears.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Man's violence against another. Common.

**DEEP CURRENT.** How did you come to our depths? How do you find yourself here? How came you to be on the ship? Why the journey? What destination?

**NORAH.** Him. He killed me.

**EBB TIDE.** Tell us.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Give your story to the deep.

**NORAH.** I saw him. I saw him.

**DEEP CURRENT.** And what did you see?

*(THE SAILOR enters, and stealthily approaches a male passenger who lies on the floor, coughing. THE SAILOR kneels next to him, feeling his pockets. He pulls out a pocket watch and puts it in his own pocket. The sick man rouses and reaches up. Looking furtively around, THE SAILOR presses his knee against the man's throat. NORAH walks up and stops, watching. The sick man struggles and tries to move THE SAILOR's leg, struggling more frantically, but THE SAILOR puts his hand on the man's mouth. After a bit, the man lies still. THE SAILOR stands and wipes his hands on his jacket, nudges the man with a toe, then spots NORAH.)*

**THE SAILOR.** *(Grabbing NORAH by the arm:)* You didn't see nothing, yeah?

**NORAH.** You . . . you . . .

**THE SAILOR.** *(Getting in her face:)* No, it's dark down here, you didn't see nothing.

*(She runs, and THE SAILOR chases her, finally catching her.)*

**NORAH.** I saw you!

**THE SAILOR.** No! What you saw was a kindness, do you hear me? All of you sorry dogs could benefit from the same. It was a mercy, and no mistake.

*(NORAH struggles; THE SAILOR shakes her.)*

**THE SAILOR.** You listen to me, harlot. What do you think is waiting for you across the sea? Open arms, food on every plate? No, quarantine islands, full of the dying and the dead—and they're hoping for dead, ain't they? **THEY DON'T WANT YOU THERE**, do you hear me? You're all just rats to them, coming hungry and desperate off a sinking ship. No one wants you. Even God is starving you, even God.

**NORAH.** *(Struggles, manages to get partially free:)* Don't you speak God's name! That man was sick, and you put your knee on his throat, and—

**THE SAILOR.** And what about it? I only helped him along. He wouldn't have lasted the journey. I only took pity.

**NORAH.** You took his life, and for *this!*

*(She quickly reaches in his pocket and pulls out a watch—he grabs it back.)*

The last thing he had on earth. No family, no food, just that.

**THE SAILOR.** Soon be no good to him, would it? Time means nothing to the dead.

**NORAH.** He might have lived! You know not!

**THE SAILOR.** Death was knocking. I just asked him in.

**NORAH.** You killed that man! Murderer! God will see you punished!

**THE SAILOR.** I am beloved by God, baptized, washed in the blood, not like you, filthy heathen, filthy papist.

**NORAH.** Murder is a sin!

**THE SAILOR.** Who's gonna heed you, Irish? Go on your way. Go on.

**NORAH.** I won't! You killed that man.

*(THE SAILOR grabs her and tries to cover her mouth but she struggles and runs away.)*

I ran up to the deck, looking for someone, anyone. But he caught me. He caught me and then he killed me too.

*(THE SAILOR exits. A storm is brewing. Thunder and lightning begin, distant at first, then drawing closer.)*

**ROGUE WAVE.** This man, he is a stain.

**EBB TIDE.** Yes.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Murderer! How can we allow it? He must be stopped!

**DEEP CURRENT.** *(To ROGUE WAVE:)* I thought you cared not for them.

**ROGUE WAVE.** I care for justice!

**NORAH.** I've never known justice. Not once.

**EBB TIDE.** All these souls. Suffering, struggling.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Treated as trash.

**EBB TIDE.** Cast out, no home.

**ROGUE WAVE.** *(Angrily:)* And what are their crimes?

**EBB TIDE.** To be poor.

**DEEP CURRENT.** To be homeless.

**EBB TIDE.** To be starving.

*(ISEULT steps forward.)*

*(The storm grows more intense. THE SAILOR appears on deck.)*

**DEEP CURRENT.** To be sick.

*(UNA appears, holding the baby. She lifts it up.)*

**EBB TIDE.** To be small.

*(He touches the baby.)*

**ROGUE WAVE.** To be unwanted.

**EBB TIDE.** Needing help.

**ROGUE WAVE.** Needing understanding.

**DEEP CURRENT.** Needing safety.

**ROGUE WAVE.** The crime of being cast out.

**NORAH.** The crime of simply being alive.

**ROGUE WAVE.** There shall be justice!

**EBB TIDE.** We will make it.

**ROGUE WAVE.** There shall be justice!

**DEEP CURRENT.** Let us make it so.

**THE SEA.** *(Gathering below THE SAILOR, chanting, growing in intensity:)* Make it so! Make it so! MAKE IT SO!

*(A large clap of thunder, and ROGUE WAVE leaps up and grabs THE SAILOR, pulling him over into the arms of THE SEA.)*

**THE SEA.** Justice!

**THE SAILOR.** No!

**THE SEA.** Justice!

**THE SAILOR.** (*Struggling but being pulled down by THE SEA:*) Help!  
Man over the side! Man . . .

(*THE SAILOR struggles and chokes and calls out "Help!" but in one forceful motion, he is immediately pulled back down and held.*)

**DEEP CURRENT.** There is no help for you.

**THE SAILOR.** (*Angrily:*) Who speaks?

**ROGUE WAVE.** (*Angrily, echoed by THE SEA:*) We are the sea!

**EBB TIDE.** There is no help for you.

**DEEP CURRENT.** The sea judges and finds you . . .

**THE SEA.** Guilty!

**ROGUE WAVE.** Guilty of causing suffering!

**THE SEA.** Guilty!

**ROGUE WAVE.** Guilty of desecrating the dead!

**THE SEA.** Guilty!

**ROGUE WAVE.** Guilty of murder!

(*THE SEA echoes "murder" twice.*)

**THE SAILOR.** I regret nothing! Nothing!

(*ISEULT approaches and THE SAILOR recoils in shock.*)

**THE SAILOR.** No, you're dead!

**ISEULT.** Do you regret the boat hook?

**THE SAILOR.** Dirty Irish! You would take what's mine down to the soles of my shoes! You would take everything given the chance!

(*UNA approaches, and THE SAILOR holds up his hands.*)

**THE SAILOR.** No! Begone!

**UNA.** Do you regret withholding water?

**THE SAILOR.** Irish shanty rat! You would take all! I've seen you, sunken eyes, crawling with vermin, with babes you can't feed, begging, begging, wanting inside my skin, wanting my very life!

(*NORAH approaches, and THE SAILOR covers his eyes.*)

**THE SAILOR.** (*Pointing:*) Dead by my own hand! Begone! Begone!

**NORAH.** Do you regret me?

# THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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