

Benthos

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A one-act play by Selah DeGering

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Benthos  
by Selah DeGering  
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A one-act play

5 women.

A living room with large windows and a front door. There is a fireplace with a chair before it. Any time period; a heavy rainstorm. Night.

### Cast of Characters

Marcail	Fifties, a former selkie. Mother to Saorsa.
Saorsa	Early teens.
Betris	Early teens.
Marta	Early teens.
Waifs (2+)	Selkies, spirits of the ocean. Fulfill the will of the sea goddess. Double-cast with Betris, Marta, and Siubhan.
A'mé	Sea goddess.

Act I

A sparse, dark living room with a dark hearth. A chair sits before the fireplace. A rainstorm rages outside the windows. BETRIS and MARTA run past and peek through the windows one at a time, scurrying about to avoid detection.

MARTA  
Supposed t'be off by now.

BETRIS  
Hush, you.

MARTA  
They're waiting for us at your stupid witch party--

BETRIS  
Shh!

Tense silence.

MARTA  
I told you, ain no point runnin' about--

A terrible peal of thunder. BETRIS screams in fright. MARTA hastily covers her mouth.

MARTA  
Runnin' about wi'the likes of Saorsa Connors. She's flighty.

BETRIS  
Marta, I swear...

MARTA  
Now hush your screamin' and let's get out of here.

BETRIS  
She's coming out! Saorsa, over here--

MARTA covers BETRIS's mouth again as  
MARCAIL enters in her nightgown, a blanket  
tossed over her shoulder as she cradles a lit match.  
She HUMS an old tune.

Can we go now?  
MARTA

Shut up!  
BETRIS

Their chatter is interrupted by thunder. MARCAIL  
pauses her song and looks out the window- the girls  
duck, although she doesn't seem to be looking for  
them. MARCAIL shrugs off the blanket and uses  
the match to light the fire. The room flickers red  
and gold as she lays out the blanket before the chair.

I could do for a fire. I bet they've got one at home.  
MARTA

BETRIS hits MARTA.

See, she's staying.  
MARTA

MARCAIL stands on the blanket. HUMMING, she  
sways, entering a half-hearted dance. MARTA  
begins to leave. BETRIS catches her by the arm.

You're not going anywhere til Saorsa comes out.  
BETRIS

MARCAIL stops to take a breath.

You're in control.  
MARCAIL

MARCAIL starts her dance again.

MARCAIL

Forgive me, God, I only mean to do this once.

MARCAIL stops and sits, distressed.

MARTA

Her Mam's crazy.

BETRIS

Just wait a minute.

MARTA

Why? You know that, I know that--

MARCAIL hums again, somewhat brokenly.

MARCAIL

I'm a fool to call her now. I'm a fool.

MARCAIL is on her knees.

MARCAIL

Father God? No- I mean... Are you listening, Mam? I've something to talk to you about. I know, it's been a long time... You'll think I've gone mad.

An eerie SINGING begins. Softly, softly, the light and flicker of the fire turn to a calming blue, casting a lens of water over the walls. The storm is replaced with the sound of gentle waves. Shadows of fish pass. MARCAIL is rejuvenated.

MARCAIL

But I'm not mad. I'm human, Mam, and-

Thunder crashes and the girls scream. MARCAIL realizes she is being watched. The room is suddenly surfaced, the fireplace sparking red and illuminating SAORSA, fully dressed and carrying a bundle, sneaking toward the front door. The storm resumes.

Finally.

MARTA

Did you see that?

BETRIS

The crazy lady talkin' to herself?

MARTA

Shh!

BETRIS

Saorsa, you nearly killed me, sneaking like that! Where are you going?

MARCAIL

Thirsty.

SAORSA

...Thirsty.

MARCAIL

Ooh...

MARTA

(referring to her clothes) And, uh...cold. From the storm. Can I have an extra blanket?

SAORSA

One's not enough?

MARCAIL

What? Oh! Oh, right, um--

SAORSA

SAORSA hugs the bundle to her chest.

I just--

SAORSA

MARCAIL

Saorsa.

MARTA

Girlie's gonna crack...

BETRIS

She will not.

SAORSA

Everybody's going to be there, Mam, I have to go. Please? The girls are waiting on me and I'm late already, and I'll be talk of the town for sure if I don't show, I'll never hear the end of it--

MARCAIL

Y'mean to leave, then? Vanish in the night, in the middle of a storm, all because some town girls said so? ...Where are you all off to? And I do mean "all". Saorsa, the door.

MARCAIL looks directly at BETRIS. BETRIS points to herself, "me?" MARCAIL nods gravely.

SAORSA opens the door. BETRIS and MARTA shamefully enter the house.

SAORSA

Marta, I'm ashamed at you. Betris, I'm not surprised. Where are you all headed? Does your mother know where you two are?

BETRIS nods. MARTA shakes her head. BETRIS hits her.

MARCAIL

And this fine night you're going to?

SAORSA, MARTA and BETRIS look at one another.

SAORSA

...The beach.

MARTA

Ha!



Marta, I'll hang you!

BETRIS

I told you coming for her was a bad idea, and look: I was right.

MARTA

What beach?

MARCAIL

What?

MARTA

What beach?

MARCAIL

Ain going to no beach. Saorsa might be, I dunno about them.

MARTA

You going home, then, Marta? Shall I walk you? How about we all go home?

MARCAIL

Wait! Mam, wait.

SAORSA

Yes, Mrs. Connors, please?

BETRIS

You can go looking for shells in the day, or whatever it is you all are up to. The sun ought to help.

MARCAIL

We can't.

BETRIS

Why?

MARCAIL

The m-

MARTA

BETRIS steps on MARTA's foot.

'S a full moon.

MARTA

BETRIS glares at MARTA. MARTA sticks her tongue at her.

Ah. And I take it you're going to...don't tell me. The harbor to meet boys? Go on, I've found you out.

MARCAIL

I wish.

MARTA

What was that?

MARCAIL

These two want to go to Dead Man's Cove.

MARTA

MARCAIL pales.

It's only games, Mam, honest.

SAORSA

Games at Dead Man's Cove?

MARCAIL

Everyone will be there.

SAORSA

They're doin' spells.

MARTA

From a book?

MARCAIL

Aye, it's with the others ahead. I said we ought t'visit the Harbor, but they wanted to go witchin'.

MARTA

Witching.

MARCAIL

It's nothing bad.

SAORSA

Frolicking at ungodly hours, doing spells?

MARCAIL

MARCAIL looks to MARTA.

And dancing.

MARTA

And dancing. Saorsa, I dinnae know you were fool enough to go along with something like this.

MARCAIL

Mam!

SAORSA

And what do you have there?

MARCAIL

I borrowed it.

SAORSA

May I see?

MARCAIL

It's only for tonight. It's Ailis's sister's, her mam made it.

SAORSA

SAORSA hands her the bundle. MARCAIL unfurls it to reveal a richly embroidered seal-skin coat.

...It's fine, indeed. Betris, Marta, do you have coats like these?

MARCAIL

MARTA looks expectantly at BETRIS.

BETRIS

...We've yet to pick them up.

MARTA

Evelyn's got extras.

SAORSA

Aoife got this one as a betrothal gift, but she left it with Ailis for that trip South, and I didn't have a costume, so she said, "I've got a spare seal-skin," and I said, "That's lucky," and she said--

At "seal-skin", MARCAIL grasps the coat tightly.

MARCAIL

Saorsa, you know better!

SAORSA

I'll return it, don't worry.

MARCAIL

There will be no seal skin in this house.

SAORSA

Ailis won't be back for it until spring.

MARCAIL

Ailis' mother made it, didn't she? For a wedding. A wedding, heaven knows how long it took her to make. She will be interested to know where her hard work's gone, I'm sure.

SAORSA

I can return it if you just give it back--

MARCAIL and SAORSA struggle over the coat.

MARCAIL

"Borrowed", you "borrowed" it. Ailis stole that coat and lent it to you for these games of yours, these horrible games, and at Dead Man's Cove, of all places--

SAORSA

I didn't steal nothin'!

SAORSA manages to take the coat.

MARCAIL

When Aoife's mother finds out what you two are up to, who takes the blame? You think she'll fess up to it? "Oh, Mam, I needed it calling on the witches!" Do you think your little friend will honor the truth then, when it comes out you've gone traipsing in the night with heathen women? It's for those games, is it not, that you need that coat- and you two! You think your parents will appreciate a knock on their door at this time of night?

SAORSA

We're only playing, Mam, it's nothing! I'm old enough to go out with my friends if I want to!

MARCAIL

It's nothing, is it?

SAORSA

No.

MARCAIL

...Here's what I'll do. I won't tell your parents about your naughty business-

BETRIS gets excited.

MARCAIL

If and only if you go to the Harbor.

MARTA

Not home?

MARCAIL

I'm not stupid, girl, you wouldn't go home if the Lord Himself called you.

SAORSA

Thanks, Mam.

They begin to leave.

MARCAIL

Tsk, tsk, not so fast. The coat.

SAROSA

Why?

MARCAIL

You won't be needing it at the Harbor, will you? It's that, or bed. Don't get any ideas, I'll bar your windows myself.

SAORSA reluctantly hands over the coat.

MARCAIL

You two, wait outside. My daughter and I need to have a talk, then you're free to go.

The girls all look at one another. MARTA and BETRIS exit, standing outside the windows.

MARCAIL

Saorsa-

SAORSA

Why do you have to spoil everything? You never let me do what I want!

MARCAIL

Is that why you tried to sneak out?

SAORSA

Why do I do anything? I'm fifteen! I do what pleases me!

MARCAIL

There's a reason I don't want you down at the Cove--

SAORSA

Yes, selkies, Amé, big, bad, scary.

MARCAIL

No, not big, bad, scary! Real! Vengeful, and real, and she'll do anything to have you. This coat? Dangerous! That Cove? Dangerous! I'm only keeping you safe!

SAORSA

You know what everyone thinks of you? Of us? They all say we're crazy. I'm lucky t'have any friends at all, and even them! They say so, too. They say you're mad.

MARCAIL

Well, we know better, don't we?

SAORSA

I don't believe in Amé, Mam. I don't believe in sea witches or goddesses or any of your strange rituals you do trying to keep her away. I believe in going out at night and doing what-all with my time on the weekend.

MARCAIL

Promise me you'll go to the Harbor.

SAORSA

Why bother? At this point, I may just go t'spite you!

SAORSA turns to storm out, but is grabbed and yanked back harshly by MARCAIL. As MARCAIL speaks, the fire sparks blue and the room darkens, underwater. SAORSA feels a chill.

MARCAIL

Amé is real, and she'd sooner skin you into a coat than play nice with you. She'll change you into something you don't recognize. You won't remember anything, know anything, and you'll have no mother to protect you under the sea with that hag, do you understand me?

SAROSA breaks away, horrified.

MARCAIL

The selkies use these coats to return to her kingdom. They won't hesitate to take you with them, and when you go, you'll become one of them. You'll be fished after, a mindless animal with no will of your own, caught in a net. Some man will pry your flesh off you with whatever they can find so they can trap you on land, forever. Until you die. But you won't. Amé will find you and bring you down again. You'll have to live through that cycle over and over and never remember how to stop it.

SAORSA backs toward the door.

MARCAIL

God is your only answer. He is your only salvation, Saorsa, there is no other way out. Stay away from Dead Man's Cove, or so help you, God, I can't save you.

SAROSA

You really are mad.

SAORSA exits hastily. The girls at the window follow.

MARCAIL

...Are you still there? ... You're not a hag.

The waves growl.

MARCAIL

No, you won't. You will not have her tonight, you're here. Can't be in two places at once.

The tide hisses.

MARCAIL

Well, I'm not sorry! I called you to talk about me, not my parenting!

Louder.

MARCAIL

She has no interest in your lessons, she has a mother. A good one.