

To Form a Pearl

Open to a blue-lit stage (setting: middle of an ocean). ADRIAN (a youth around 16 in pants and shirt) is lying on top of a large wooden crate, unconscious. ONDINE (a woman (with age up to interpretation) in a black-stained white dress) sits on another, smaller crate.

(ADRIAN wakes up, startling when he sees ONDINE.)

ONDINE

[Con conversationally]

I see you are awake. You worried me, you know. When I first saw you, you had the complexion of a decompressed blobfish.

(ADRIAN stares for a moment longer.)

ADRIAN

Who're you?

ONDINE

I am Ondine, a spirit of the sea. And you? What are you called?

(ADRIAN gapes at her.)

ADRIAN

How— What—

ONDINE

Is there something wrong?

ADRIAN

No— I— Adrian.

ONDINE

Excuse me?

ADRIAN

Adrian. My name's Adrian.

(ADRIAN looks around and takes in his surroundings.)

ADRIAN (Cont'd)

The storm. I— I was at the docks. There was a huge wave— and—

ONDINE

Perhaps not the best idea to be near the waters during a storm.
I've heard that drowning is one of the more unpleasant ways to
die.

ADRIAN

[Aside]

I'd have suffocated either way.

ONDINE

Hm?

ADRIAN

Nothing. Thank you for saving me, by the way. Even if I looked like a blobfish.

ONDINE

[Amused]

You are welcome. However, you may have expressed your gratitude too early. You have yet to reach land.

(ADRIAN looks around.)

ADRIAN

(Huffs a laugh) You're right. I have no idea where we are.

(ADRIAN leans back and puts a hand to his brow.)

ADRIAN (Cont'd)

[Melodramatically]

Oh, the tragedy. The corpse of a youth, discovered on the shores by some poor beachgoer. I wonder how much of my body would be left.

ONDINE

I imagine your bones would be the only thing left of you after the gulls found your body.

ADRIAN

I guess my french fries weren't enough to appease them. Maybe I should've given them my fish too.

(ONDINE laughs.)

ONDINE

Do not worry about your death for the time being, Adrian. I did not save you for the purpose of seeing your death.

ADRIAN

You're gonna take me home?

ONDINE

The currents should take us to the nearest shore. For now, let us talk. I have not had a chance to interact properly with a human for a long time. What goes on land these days?

ADRIAN

Nothing really important that hasn't been going on for the past couple of decades. Protests, wars, climate change. It's been that way for as long as I can remember.

ONDINE

I see. I suppose that is to be expected. While you may have advanced in technology and knowledge, I have never known humans to change their fundamental behaviors easily.

ADRIAN

[Sadly]

There's a reason people say history repeats itself, I guess.

(ADRIAN sighs and changes his tone.)

ADRIAN

If you're a sea spirit, are you immortal?

ONDINE

Correct.

ADRIAN

Then...what do humans seem like to you?

ONDINE

To me?

ADRIAN

Yeah. You must've been able to watch humans for ages. What do you make of us?

(ONDINE thinks for a moment.)

ONDINE

Humans... are like sand.

ADRIAN

Sand?

ONDINE

Yes. Sand. Alone, they are insignificant. A small speck in the vast blue sea of life. However, in numbers, they are impossible to not notice the presence of.

Even their persistence is like sand. No matter how many times civilizations get swept away by the incoming waves, they always manage to rebuild and remain on the shores.

(ONDINE looks down at her black-stained dress.)

ONDINE

[with sadness]

They spread their reach to every corner of the world. In every crevice, a couple grains of sand. An oil spill here. A garbage patch there. No matter how much you try to scrub them away, they always come back.

ADRIAN

[In a near whisper, like a child who was reprimanded]

I'm...I'm sorry.

ONDINE

Do not be. These are the actions of your predecessors, not you. It would be unjust of me to have a single youth carry the sins of their kind.

(ADRIAN stares at his hands.)

ADRIAN

It's still there.

ONDINE

Hm?

ADRIAN

The weight. You don't make me carry it; you don't have to. I feel it when I see the floods on TV and the lifeless animals in their chains. I feel it when the smoke chokes up my lungs and the skyscrapers block out the sun and the stars.

Do you know why I was out on the docks today? It's because I couldn't take it anymore. I would rather be swept away to sea than be in that concrete cemetery. What difference does it make if I did drown? A life without joy isn't a life worth living. What good can I do if I stayed, anyway?

...Why don't you hate us? Why did you save me?

(ONDINE considers ADRIAN for a beat, thinking of what to say.)

ONDINE

I will admit I have considered hating. When the seas boiled and the heavens roared in anger, I considered it.

(ONDINE smiles.)

ONDINE (Cont'd)

But how could I? How could I hate humans, when I see the children who shriek in delight as they play in the waves? How could I hate humans, when I see the people who clean the shores together?

Sand finds its way into every corner of the world, but is that always a bad thing? Sometimes, if a grain of sand sneaks inside of an oyster, the oyster will turn it into a pearl.

I will not say that you should not feel the weight, Adrian. However, it is not yours to bear alone. You're allowed to see beauty. You're allowed to laugh. You're allowed to *hope*. As to why I rescued you, why would I not? What if you, Adrian, are a pearl-to-be?

As ONDINE talks, the stage lights on stage left slowly start to turn a dim, sandy color. It is nighttime. Two spotlights shine on ONDINE and ADRIAN.

(ONDINE looks stage left.)

ONDINE (Cont'd)

It looks like we have arrived. Will you be alright on your own?

ADRIAN

Yeah, I recognize this beach. I'll find my way home.

(ADRIAN climbs off of his crate and onto shore. One spotlight follows him. He turns to face ONDINE.)

ADRIAN (Cont'd)

Thank you, Ondine. For everything.

ONDINE

It was my pleasure.

ADRIAN

Will I ever see you again?

ONDINE

That is for fate to decide. But even if we never meet again, remember to hope. Without it, there is no future.

(ONDINE lightly pushes ADRIAN towards offstage.)

ONDINE

Go.

(ADRIAN motions to go offstage before pausing and turning back towards ONDINE.)

ADRIAN

(With a small wave) See you.

(ADRIAN starts walking offstage. ONDINE watches after him for a few beats before getting off of her crate. She reaches into her dress pocket to produce a large pearl and places it in her place. She walks out of her spotlight in the opposite direction. ADRIAN stops just before going offstage and turns back one last time. He sees the pearl and walks towards it, picking it up.)

ADRIAN

[To himself]

A pearl-to-be, huh?

(Smiling, ADRIAN pockets the pearl and walks offstage.)

As ADRIAN goes offstage, the stage lights fade away. The sound of ocean waves is audible, gradually getting louder before dying down as the stage lights start to brighten again. Many years have passed.

(OLDER ADRIAN (in late 70's/early 80's, wearing boots and bundled up in a thick jacket and a beanie) slowly walks onstage, carrying a lawn chair. He sets it down at center stage and sits. Most of his attire/belongings bear logos of charities/nonprofits.)

OLDER ADRIAN

Hello, Ondine. I hope you're doing well.

You might not remember me. Or recognize me. It's been a long time, after all.

(OLDER ADRIAN sighs.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

You might not even be here right now.

(OLDER ADRIAN leans forward, hands clasped on his knees.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

I just wanted to say thank you. Again.

(OLDER ADRIAN looks up.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

You made me believe that I could accomplish something. That I could be one of the pearls you were talking about. In a way, you saved me twice that day. I don't know how much good I actually did, but hopefully it's enough to make you feel good about our whole encounter.

(OLDER ADRIAN smiles.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

I have something I want you to do for me, if you don't mind.

(OLDER ADRIAN reaches into his jacket pocket and retrieves the pearl. He gets up from his seat and walks to the edge of the stage, placing the pearl there before walking back to his chair.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

[To the audience]

Pass it on for me, and tell them what you told me. Tell them that it's okay to laugh, to feel happy. That it's okay to hope. Maybe, hopefully, they'll be saved like I was.

(OLDER ADRIAN closes his folding chair.)

OLDER ADRIAN (Cont'd)

[Softly]

Thank you, Ondine. For everything.

(OLDER ADRIAN exits stage left. Only the pearl is left.)

Curtains close.