WHALE-WOMEN

A Short Play
by Margaret O'Donnell

Cast Breakdown

ALISON
Female. Worried. Early 60s.

ANNIE
A female orca. On land, she takes human form: Old, scrawny, irreverent.

It's winter of the present time at an old 'rustic' and now shabby beach resort on the west side of San Juan Island. Alison is the now former caretaker of the resort. She's a passionate whale photographer, and lives in one of the resort cabins. The resort has just been sold to a luxury housing developer, and Alison's been served with an eviction notice. She's lost her home and her job.

Whale Women

Alison sits at her kitchen table, downing a glass of whisky. She chokes on the burn. She contemplates the eviction notice, and then a row of pill bottles, picking them up, putting them down. She startled by a loud banging on the cabin door, and high-pitched cries. She goes to the door.

ALISON

Who is it?

The cries and banging continue. Alison opens the door and Annie comes stumbling in.

ANNIE

Whew! I thought you'd never open the door! Whaddya doin' with a locked door anyway? I wasn't counting on havin' to yell the place down.

ALISON

Who are you? What do you want?

ANNIE

(*looking around)* Got any food? I'm starving. I mean, really starving. Pickin's been terrible all winter.

Annie starts opening doors and drawers, looking. She begins to open the darkroom door.

ALISON

No! Not there! That's my darkroom. You'll ruin the prints!

ANNIE

What does it matter? Aren't you done with all this? Looks like you're about to call it quits. (*she indicates the pill bottles and whisky.*) But okay. Hey, can I have your clothes? And the blanket? But first, food. You gotta have somethin'.

ALISON

If I give you food, will you leave?

ANNIE

Maybe. Maybe not. Let's see the food.

Alison brings out a loaf of bread and some cheese. While she's occupied, Annie stuffs all the bottles in a pocket.

ALISON

Here.

ANNIE

(*begins to stuff her mouth; she talks with her mouth full*) God, this is so damn stale! How can you stand it? Good thing I'm not picky. What else you got?

ALISON

I haven't been buying groceries for a while/

ANNIE

(*eating*) Pickles? Ketchup? Jar of mayo? Humans usually have that kind of stuff.

Alison piles some bottles and plastic containers from the refrigerator on the table.

ALISON

Have at it.

ANNIE

Crackers? Cans of something? Anything.

Alison pulls more stuff from the cabinets and piles it on the table.

ANNIE

Can opener? Plate? Knife?

Alison gets them.

ANNIE

All right! Better than what I've been getting lately. I take it this whisky's up for grabs? If you're still planning to off yourself, I'll leave you enough.

Alison brings another glass.

ALISON

Help yourself. (*she watches Annie eat and belch*.) How'd you know about me? Where are…? Did you take the bottles?

ANNIE

Maybe. I saw you through the window. Figured I'd be better off with you alive.

ALISON

Why? Why do you care? (*she looks at the cabin's high windows*.) Nobody can see in those windows.

ANNIE

Oh, maybe I looked down the chimney. I don't remember.

Alison makes a 'what the hell' gesture. There is no chimney.

ANNIE

Let's get to the important stuff. What's your name, anyway?

ALISON

Alison.

Annie fills two glasses and pushes one over to Alison. Annie drinks.

ANNIE

(*choking*) Pee-yew! Now that is God-awful. What are you doing to yourself with this crappy stuff? No wonder you're ready to take off. Don't know how to treat yourself right.

ALISON

So don't drink it then.

ANNIE

Oh no. Are you kidding? Any port in a storm.

ALISON

Why'd you say humans?

ANNIE

When?

ALISON

A little bit ago. You said humans usually have that kind of stuff.

ANNIE

'Cause they do. Around here they do.

ALISON

And you don't?

ANNIE

I don't live on land. I don't have a refrigerator. And I ain't human.

ALISON

You look human.

ANNIE

Good! That's what I'm going for. The human look. See, that's why I'm here. That and the food. Crappy as it is.

ALISON

What are you then?

ANNIE

An orca.

ALISON

Please.

ANNIE

I'd show you, but then I might get stranded in here.

ALISON

Orcas don't talk!

Annie opens her mouth and the cabin fills with orca sounds, the sound of waves, and an orca spy-hopping. Alison covers her ears. The sounds stop.

ANNIE

We talk. But let's get down to business. You've been takin' pictures of me a long time.

ALISON

Of you? Oh yeah. You're an orca. Right. You want me to ask permission?

ANNIE

(*laughs*) Naw. But it's only fair we should benefit, somehow. (*beat*) I mean, we're desperate out there. You gotta know what's happening to us.

Annie begins to look through the framed prints of orcas stacked against the wall.

ALISON

Of course I know! Protecting what we still have left in this land and water is my life's work! You know everything about me already, so why don't you know that? People around here call me the Whale Woman.

ANNIE

Great name you got there. So, Whale Woman, why do you care about us?

ALISON

We're all connected, that's why. Orca die, and we've lost our hope, our hearts, our souls. It's that much harder for people to care about what we're doing to our water, our air, our salmon, our trees, all of us and all future generations. And besides, I know most of the southern residents. I think of them as family. I care about each one.

ANNIE

Bravo! Bravo! Now that's a ringing endorsement of us!. And looky here. Here's a good one of me!

Annie holds up one of the framed prints.

ALISON

Glad you like it. (*beat*) You said it's only fair that orcas benefit from my work.

ANNIE

Yes! that's exactly where I need your help! You gotta get these pictures out there. Get support, you know, like when people see how pretty we are, they'll stop all the crap they're doing to us. It's like they don't know we're there.

ALISON

It's not that easy!

ANNIE

Look. These are desperate times. There are only seventy-four of us Southern Residents left. Seventy-four! And only three pods. Everyone else starved or got poisoned by all the crap in the water. It's so hard to find salmon now. First, they can't make it over the dams to spawn. Next, they're so small! Back in the day, they were like a hundred pounds! And third, it's so noisy in the water we can't use our what-do-you-call it –ecolocation—to find them. And on top of it all, the water's filled with crappy chemicals that got into our breast milk and lungs.

ALISON

I know this! Okay?

ANNIE

Yeah? And what are you doing about it? Lately.

ALISON

I've tried to sell my photos! I don't even make enough to pay for the supplies. Look. I lost my job and this cabin. This is an eviction notice! I've gone all over town, applying for jobs, applying for unemployment, applying for apartments! Nothing!

ANNIE

Look, Ali. Okay if I call you Ali? I feel like I'm getting to know you. You've gotta try it. We'll all die out there. You have a room. You have food. Warmth. You've got clean air. And nobody's starving you out or poisoning you or making it so noisy you can't think. You got everything you need! Can you spare a little attention to the rest of creation?

ALISON

Nobody listens to people like me.