

YOU OTTER KNOW

A short play by Allie Costa

ENHYDRA - Any gender. Sea otter. Bashful, youthful.

LUTRIS - Any gender. Sea otter. Smart. Should come across like an older sibling: a little bit bossy, a little bit protective.

NOTE: Casting is completely gender-flexible. In this draft, Enhydra is female and Lutris is male. Please feel free to adjust pronouns based on your cast!

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allie@alliecosta.com

<http://www.alliecosta.com>

AT RISE:

LIGHTS UP on LUTRIS, who stands center, and ENHYDRA, who is hiding behind Lutris and clinging to a seaweed-colored blanket. Lutris squints in the light.

LUTRIS

(to the audience, in a straightforward tone) Hello.

A quiet beat passes. Lutris turns to look at Enhydra. *If someone in the audience responds to Lutris' greeting, if they say, "Hello!" enthusiastically, Lutris should look surprised, say "Hello" again, then continue with the script.*

LUTRIS (CONTINUED)

(to Enhydra) Come on!

Lutris whispers something to Enhydra that is equal parts frustrated and encouraging. Enhydra slowly, eventually peeks out from behind Lutris, then quickly shakes her head and hides again. Lutris sighs.

LUTRIS (CONTINUED)

(to audience) You'll have to excuse Lutris. She's a little -- well, she's little, still. Just a pup.

ENHYDRA

(from behind Lutris) I am NOT a pup!

LUTRIS

Then come say hello to the nice people!

ENHYDRA

(stage whisper) How do you know they're nice?

LUTRIS

(rolls eyes, then addresses the audience) She's been doing this ever since she learned we were endangered. I tried to explain what it meant--

ENHYDRA

I know what it means. It means we are *in danger*. All the time.

LUTRIS

Not all the time. We're safe here.

ENHYDRA

(sniffle) You sure?

LUTRIS

I'm sure. These people won't hurt us. They're here to help us.

ENHYDRA

(doubtful) How?

LUTRIS

By learning about us. They should realize there's more to sea otters than that silly video of us holding hands.

ENHYDRA

I like that video.

Like a younger sibling seeking comfort, Enhydra slips her hand into Lutris's. Like an older sibling, Lutris pulls his hand away and wipes it on his side while making a sound of disgust.

ENHYDRA (CONTINUED)

Lutris!

LUTRIS

(mocking) Enhydra!

ENHYDRA

I'm gonna tell Mom you're making fun of me, and she won't let you back in the raft.

LUTRIS

Everyone's allowed in the raft. Did you know the biggest raft had over two thousand sea otters?

ENHYDRA

(impressed) No way!

LUTRIS

It's true.

ENHYDRA

(wrapping herself up in her blanket) You don't even know two thousand otters.

LUTRIS

You can't even count to two thousand.

ENHYDRA

Yes, I can.

LUTRIS

Oh, yeah? Prove it.

ENHYDRA

(concentrating deeply) One. Two.

LUTRIS

Quietly.

ENHYDRA

(whispering) Three. Four.

*Enhydra continues counting slowly, quietly, while
Lutris turns back to the audience.*

LUTRIS

That should keep her busy for a while. Now let me tell you something: Sea otters - are - awesome. You probably already knew that, but in case you didn't, I wanted to make sure. We're clever, vocal, and vastly entertaining. We use tools like rocks to open up shells and eat our food. My cousins, the small-clawed otters, are really good at juggling rocks.

ENHYDRA

Auntie Ambloynx says they should be in the circus.

LUTRIS

(playfully) You should be in the circus, you little monkey.

ENHYDRA

I'm not a monkey! I'm an otter!

LUTRIS

Shouldn't you be counting?

ENHYDRA

I got distracted.

LUTRIS

Well, try again. Or at least cover your ears for a minute.

(gently) You won't like this next part.

Enhydra pouts, but Lutris gives her a Look, so she covers her ears and starts counting or humming softly.

LUTRIS (CONTINUED)

(to audience) It wasn't that long ago that our numbers were seriously low. We were abundant until the 1700s - then fur traders from all over the world started hunting us for our pelts. By the early 1900s, we were nearly wiped out. Thank goodness for the International Fur Seal Treaty, which was ratified in 1911 and banned people from hunting fur-bearing mammals like us. Otherwise, we could have become extinct.

During the last few lines, Enhydra dropped her hands and started listening again. She chimes in:

ENHYDRA

You *do* stink. You smell like that fish we had for breakfast.

LUTRIS

At least my teeth aren't purple!

ENHYDRA

That's 'cause I ate the nim-nee.

LUTRIS

Anemone.

ENHYDRA

That's what I said. *(to blanket)* Isn't that what I said, Kelpy?

LUTRIS

Oh my gosh, now she's talking to her seaweed.

ENHYDRA

It helps me from drifting out to sea.

LUTRIS

That's true.

ENHYDRA

And we're in danger, aren't we?

LUTRIS

Hydie- *(pronounced like Heidi)*

ENHYDRA

Tell the truth.

Lutris hesitates. Enhydra looks at him, wide-eyed, and waits for an answer.

LUTRIS

Yes, we're endangered. We have been since 1977.

ENHYDRA

That's a long time ago.

LUTRIS

Yeah. But if people watch out for us, if they take care of the sea and help keep us safe, we'll still be around for a long time.

ENHYDRA

Can't the fishermen hurt us?

LUTRIS

Anything could hurt us. Anything that damages our food sources or our habitat, like oil spills-

ENHYDRA

(stubbornly) Oil and water don't mix.

LUTRIS

They don't. Neither do oil and otters. But we're lucky, Hydie. Not only are we adorable and intelligent, we're protected. There are laws that protect us, and there are some groups of humans that look out for us, like Friends of the Sea Otter.

ENHYDRA

(brightening a little bit) I like friends.

LUTRIS

Me too. And scientists know we're important. Conservationists call us a keystone species.

ENHYDRA

Keys? What do we open?

LUTRIS

(with a laugh) We don't open anything - we hold it up! You know that archway we saw by the bridge? A keystone is that stone at the very top, right in the center. It's the piece that holds everything together. The arch would collapse without it.

ENHYDRA

So... sea otters hold up the ocean?

LUTRIS

You could say that. We are central to our ecosystem. By eating sea urchins, we help protect kelp forests from damage.

ENHYDRA

(hugging her blanket) I love kelp!

LUTRIS

I know you do.

ENHYDRA

How do we help the kelp? *(giggles)* Help the kelp! That rhymes.

LUTRIS

You're a poet and you didn't even know it. Sea otters keep the population of sea floor herbivores in check, which helps the kelp forest keep growing, and that's the home to a lot of different species, not just us. So we're helping everyone in our neighborhood, and the entire ocean, and the whole world! Isn't that cool?

ENHYDRA

(nods, then) So then...who's gonna help us?

Lutris takes Enhydra's hand.

LUTRIS

I'm hoping... *(turns to the audience)* they will.

Enhydra stands very close to Lutris and looks out.

ENHYDRA

Me, too.

Lights slowly go down. END OF PLAY.