

# SEA CHANGE

## By Alan Haehnel

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**SYNOPSIS:** Chaos—that's what Shoshanna's life has become. Her parents decide to divorce, so Shoshanna retreats to her Grandmere's sea-side house for refuge over the summer. There she finds comfort from the turmoil, but shortly after Shoshanna leaves to return home, a hurricane strikes; the storm surge sweeps Grandmere and her house away. Now Shoshanna can only see everything, especially school, as a meaningless jumble. Working with Jill, her therapist, Shoshanna learns to use the rhythms of Grandmere's life to free herself from her depression. Alternating between the realistic conversation of Shoshanna's counseling sessions and the poetic ways Shoshanna re-orders her life, "Sea Change" is an unconventional, uplifting one-act play. Vermont State One Act Finalist, 2012.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(11 Female, 8 Male, 30 Either, Doubling Possible. This play could be performed with as few as 20 actors.)*

SHOSHANNA (f).....	Central character, 16 years old (91 lines)
JILL (f).....	Shoshanna's therapist (67 lines)
GRANDMERE'S VOICE (m/f).....	Composed of three actors' voices (6 lines)
KATIE (f).....	Shoshanna's classmate (6 lines)
IDA (f) .....	Katie's friend (3 lines)
STUDENTS 1-16 (m/f).....	(23 lines)
SARGE 1-3 (m/f) .....	Poets putting students through boot camp (56 lines)
RECRUITS (m/f) .....	Students being put through boot camp (3 lines)
MOLLY (f) .....	Shoshanna's friend (6 lines)
AARON (m).....	Poet bragging about his girlfriend (12 lines)

BOB (m) .....	Aaron's friend (11 lines)
SAM (m) .....	Aaron's friend (11 lines)
DAD (m) .....	Shoshanna's parent (8 lines)
MOM (f) .....	Shoshanna's parent (8 lines)
CANCER 1-8 (m/f) .....	Poets discussing demise of Shoshanna's parents' marriage (40 lines)
JENNY (f) .....	Solo poet (1 line)
REGAN (f) .....	Solo poet (12 lines)
REGGIE (m) .....	Solo poet (11 lines)
JASON (m) .....	Solo poet (1 line)
PAUL (m) .....	Solo poet (1 line)
MARCUS (m) .....	Solo poet (5 lines)
STACEY (f) .....	Solo poet (6 lines)
JUSTINE (f) .....	Solo poet (1 line)
MORGAN (f) .....	Solo poet (1 line)

### PRODUCTION NOTES

**SET:** Three sets of stairs going across the stage in a wave-like pattern.

**DURATION:** 30 minutes

**DIRECTOR NOTES**

This play contains poetry of various types—some with easy rhythms and rhymes, others with patterns not so easily sensed. As an aid, I've created a YouTube video in which I explain how we handled some of the more difficult poetic bits in this play. If you search using my name, Alan Haehnel, and the title “Sea Change,” you'll find it.

**AUTHOR NOTES**

While our production of “Sea Change” was fairly elaborate in its set design and costuming, those elements should not be the focus of the show. We built six stair units with affixed front benches, all painted with swirling colors suggesting the ocean. But a few platforms or even a bare stage would suffice. Besides street clothes for most of the play, we bought white outfits for the cancer section and tie-dyed many more of them for the final scene; we also built a complicated mobile and a corresponding ethereal costume to represent Grandmere. But regular clothes with a few evocative accessories would do the job quite handily, too. “Sea Change,” at its core, is about Shoshanna using poetry to come to terms with her life. The basic elements of voice, rhythm and honest acting will communicate this message much more than will any complicated set or costume.

**PRODUCTION HISTORY**

“Sea Change” premiered at Hartford High School, in Hartford, Vermont, in February of 2012. Alan Haehnel directed and Melissa Wyman assistant directed. The premiere featured the following cast:

Shoshanna .....	Emma Healy
Jill (therapist) .....	Merrill Cameron
Ensemble.....	Jon Alvin, Mackenzie Brown, Alicia Cerasoli, Christian Dauphinais, Laura Felone, Kim French, Teddy Gales, Austin Haehnel, David Kersey, Jamie Mesler, Colt Nielsen, Cori Peterson, Brittany Rathburn, Rachel Rathburn, Molly Robinson, Allyson Rugg, Danielle Scelza, Ava Simond, Stephen Witkowski
Katie.....	Allyson Rugg
Ida .....	Danielle Scelza
Sarge 1 .....	Austin Haehnel
Sarge 2 .....	Molly Robinson
Sarge 3 .....	Ava Simond
Molly.....	Laura Felone
Aaron .....	Teddy Gales
Bob.....	Colt Nielsen
Sam .....	Jon Alvin
Aaron's third friend .....	Stephen Witkowski
Dad.....	Christian Dauphinais
Mom.....	Kim French
Cancer Voices .....	Danielle Scelza, Allyson Rugg, Molly Robinson, Austin Haehnel, Rachel Rathburn, Jamie Mesler, David Kersey, Laura Felone
Jenny .....	Alicia Cerasoli
Regan .....	Cori Peterson
Reggie.....	Stephen Witkowski
Jason.....	Teddy Gales
Paul .....	Jon Alvin
Marcus .....	Colt Nielsen
Stacey.....	Ava Simond
Justine .....	Mackenzie Brown
Morgan.....	Brittany Rathburn

SEA CHANGE

**AT RISE:** *Dim lights come up on the stage—three sets of stairs in cross-section, creating an up and down pattern. Behind and to the sides of the stairs, we hear the sounds of waves and whispers.*

**VOICES:** Rhythm, tides, fall, time. Rhythm, tides, fall, time.

*The light shifts to SHOSHANNA, lying on the set. She is detached, depressed, meeting with JILL, a counselor. When SHOSHANNA and JILL converse, they face straight out, as if seeing one another in front of them.*

**JILL:** So, Shawna, you've had quite a summer, I understand, what with your parents splitting up.

**SHOSHANNA:** That happens all the time.

**JILL:** True, but the statistics don't diminish the difficulty of the individual experience.

**SHOSHANNA:** You've said that before.

**JILL:** This is our first meeting, Shawna.

**SHOSHANNA:** "The statistics don't diminish the difficulty of the individual experience." Sounds practiced.

**JILL:** You have a good ear. In addition to your parents' separation, your grandmother recently passed.

**SHOSHANNA:** You mean died?

**JILL:** Yes.

**SHOSHANNA:** Technically, she's missing. Presumed dead.

**JILL:** Missing. You spent the summer with her, didn't you? *(silence)*  
Now you're back and you'll be starting your junior year shortly.  
Are you ready for that?

*Suddenly, a bunch of kids at school rushes onto the set, as if back from summer break—all the noise and ruckus that comes with a mass of teenagers in movement. This noise continues for several seconds. SHOSHANNA moves amidst the crowd, bewildered. The lights change and the CROWD freezes.*

**JILL:** How was your first day back at school?

**SHOSHANNA:** Terrible.

*The lights change and the chaos of the first day continues for several seconds. On a light change, the CROWD freezes again.*

**SHOSHANNA:** I lasted about half an hour.

*The lights go down on the school scene. The CROWD crouches down slowly.*

**SHOSHANNA:** I'm not going back there.

**JILL:** That will cause quite a shift in your future.

**SHOSHANNA:** What is it you do, anyway? What do you fix?

**JILL:** That depends on the person.

**SHOSHANNA:** Okay, let's take, as a specific person, oh, let's see... me. What are you trying to do with me?

**JILL:** You know the old nursery rhyme, Humpty-Dumpty.

**SHOSHANNA:** Yeah.

**JILL:** "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall."

**SHOSHANNA:** "And all the king's horses  
and all the king's men  
couldn't put Humpty together again."

Great, nice pre-school review, thanks. So I'm a fat, cracked egg, busted to pieces. A lost cause.

**JILL:** No, I think you're more powerful than all the king's horses and all the king's men. I think you can put yourself back together again. And create a new wall to sit on.

**SHOSHANNA:** That's cute.

**JILL:** I'm nothing if not cute. Tell me more about the first day of school.

**SHOSHANNA:** Gee, I think I already said it was terrible.

**JILL:** Specific images...

**SHOSHANNA:** I don't want to give you specifics. I don't want to go back there, physically or mentally, got it? It was terrible. Awful. Heinous.

**JILL:** All right. Where *do* you want to go, physically or mentally?

*The CROWD makes the sound of ocean waves.*

**SHOSHANNA:** Where I want to go is gone.

**JILL:** Will you tell me about it?

*The wave sound comes in more loudly. SHOSHANNA rises, crosses back to the stair area.*

**SHOSHANNA:** The sea at high tide knocked  
on my Grandmere's door.  
Every day, she let it in:  
"Make yourself at home."  
The ocean *made* her home.  
Every surface swirled with shells.  
The cast-off nets of fishermen  
caught starfish and urchins,  
blue-striped buoys and red crabs,  
skates and skeletons,  
the egg sacks of sharks,  
coral bits and smooth-tumbled glass,  
all dried in the sun,  
gathered to the mantel,  
schooled to the wall,  
made family:  
kin by color and texture  
and old woman's whim.  
Come in, come in, she called to the sea,  
and she brought in its children,  
man-made, sand-made, water-made,  
all made cousins on the ceilings  
in the walkways,  
on the railings,  
the windowsills,  
the windows themselves,  
the mirrors,  
desks, counters, every surface and  
space decorated, painted, draped, adorned,  
blessed with the bounty of the sea.

*The sounds subside.*

**JILL:** You wrote that.

**SHOSHANNA:** Yeah. To try to get back there.

**JILL:** Does it work?

**SHOSHANNA:** Kind of.

**JILL:** So. Even though it's a far uglier place, will you take me to school?

**SHOSHANNA:** No. Why? I told you...

**JILL:** Shawna, this is a piece of who you once were. You used to go to school, you used to enjoy it. You have to examine it before you abandon it. And yes, I have practiced that line, too.

*The chaos of the first day comes rushing back on. SHOSHANNA enters the picture, walks around for a bit, increasingly agitated by the noise. The CROWD freezes, now in three groups on three areas of the stage.*

**SHOSHANNA:** They don't even talk! It's so senseless! One group of them is just...

*(One GROUP begins to make a chattering noise.)*

And then another sounds like...

*(Another GROUP makes a vomiting sound.)*

And over here, you've got this...

*(Another GROUP emits a high-pitched squeal.)*

And you're surrounded by this... what's the word? Cacophony!

*(EVERYONE joins in, adding a variety of horrible and annoying sounds. After several seconds of this, THEY freeze and silence.)*

I had to get out! I mean, it was...

**JILL:** Chaos.

**SHOSHANNA:** Yeah.

**JILL:** I have a challenge for you. Go back to school...

**SHOSHANNA:** Look, I...

**JILL:** Mentally. Revisit the first day. Think of it as a beach at low tide, strewn with chaos.

**SHOSHANNA:** The beach at low tide is beautiful. The school is a cesspool.

**JILL:** All analogies have their limits, Shawna.

**SHOSHANNA:** You know, my name...

**JILL:** Yes?

**SHOSHANNA:** Forget it. School is low tide. So what?

**JILL:** Then... try to pick out some details and arrange them into a new pattern, like your grandmother did with the things she collected.

**SHOSHANNA:** What is this, homework?

**JILL:** Well, you're not going to school—you've got time.

**SHOSHANNA:** This is ridiculous.

**JILL:** I understand if you can't do it, but...

**SHOSHANNA:** I'm not saying I can't. I'm saying it's ridiculous.

*SHOSHANNA exits. The chaos of the first day begins again. SHOSHANNA wanders about the CROWD for a few seconds. IT freezes.*

**SHOSHANNA:** All right, for one thing, everybody pretends to be communicating with each other, right? But listen to this.

**KATIE:** Ida!

**IDA:** Hey, girl. How was your summer?

**KATIE:** Summer? Who had a summer? We did so much traveling—I'm exhausted!

**IDA:** That is the coolest shirt.

**KATIE:** Oh, yeah, thanks. I can't remember where I got it.

**IDA:** I'm like that, too.

*They freeze.*

**SHOSHANNA:** But the whole conversation just boils down to one thing: Look at me! Notice me! Katie says she's exhausted from traveling because she wants to brag to Ida about her trips; the compliment about Katie's shirt is just Ida's attempt to get Katie to notice Ida's new clothes. It's crazy. It's the notice me dance.

*The GROUP suddenly breaks into a quasi dance with stylized movement and poses. They shift poses between each statement.*

**STUDENT 1:** I don't know if you noticed but my braces have come off.

**STUDENT 2:** I don't know if you noticed but my sweater's really soft.

**STUDENT 3:** I don't know if you noticed how my pecs are super ripped.

**STUDENT 4:** I don't know if you noticed how my hair's been newly clipped.

**STUDENT 5:** I don't know if you noticed but...

**STUDENT 6:** My shoes.

**STUDENT 7:** My books.

**STUDENT 8:** My phone.

**STUDENT 9:** My coat.

**STUDENT 10:** My cheeks.

**STUDENT 11:** My legs.

**STUDENT 12:** My shirt.

**STUDENT 13:** My Apple I Pad clone:

It holds a million songs,  
12 terabytes for drive;  
it's twice as fast and twice as new  
as any pad alive.

**STUDENT 14:** I don't know if you noticed but I've grown; I'm cuter now.

**STUDENT 15:** I don't know if you noticed but I shaved my unibrow.

**STUDENT 16:** I don't know if you noticed but I've lost a ½ a pound.

**KATIE:** I don't know if you noticed how my butt is really round  
in these pants  
of mine.  
They came from France.  
They're mine.

**STUDENT 1:** Those je ne sais quoi pants!

**STUDENT 2:** What a find!

**KATIE:** These pants from France I found on-line,  
they're mine sublime I look divine,  
They shape my derriere, so there,  
they're mine, they're mine, they're mine, mine, mine!

**ALL STUDENTS:** Those pants from France!

**KATIE:** Oo, la, la!

*The STUDENTS freeze in a pose. JILL claps.*

**JILL:** Bravo.

**SHOSHANNA:** How did I do?

**JILL:** I don't know. How did you do?

**SHOSHANNA:** *(Crossing back to JILL.)* I guess... I gave the chaos a little cosmos. A little rhythm.

**ALL STUDENTS:** *(Whispered.)* It's got to have to do with rhythm.

**JILL:** Have you thought about going back to school?

**SHOSHANNA:** I've thought about it. I've done it. Humpty Dumpty is back in school.

**JILL:** How is it?

**SHOSHANNA:** Lonely.

**ALL STUDENTS:** *(Whispered.)* It's got to have to do with tides.

**SHOSHANNA:** Everything at Grandmere's house was... smooth.

**ALL STUDENTS:** *(Whispered.)* It's got to have to do with the rise and the fall.

**SHOSHANNA:** She didn't force anything.

**ALL STUDENTS:** *(Whispered.)* Of the beating of the heart of time.

**SHOSHANNA:** She'd say, "I'm going to the flats to dig some clams."  
She'd invite me.

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** *(Three voices combined.)* Come along if you want.

**SHOSHANNA:** "I'm biking to the market to get some salad greens."

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** Come along if you want.

**SHOSHANNA:** "I'm taking my walk on the beach."

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** Come along if you want.

**SHOSHANNA:** After a while, I went with her. Just the two of us, but it wasn't lonely at all because... you were just part of the flow of things. Not like here. Not like school and home. Everything's all yank and jab. Do this! Be here! Be this! It feels... it's the opposite of comforting. It's like a war!

*THREE STUDENTS become the SARGES while the rest act as the RECRUITS, going through a tightly choreographed boot camp routine corresponding with the SARGES' commands.*

**SARGE 1:** Get up! Let's go!

**SARGE 2:** Get up and get a move on!

**SARGE 3:** Got a course we gotta run today!

**SARGE 1:** Strap on that gear, slap on a grin.

**SARGE 2:** Get it cranking, get it spanking!

**ALL 3 SARGES:** Let's go, go, go!

**SARGE 3:** Start crawling, babies, keep on the path—

**SARGE 1:** Got walls to either side full of broken glass.

**SARGE 2:** Got land mines, barbed wire.

**SARGE 3:** Guns, grenades and bombs.

**SARGE 1:** Got a slate of expectations that'll blow off all your limbs.

**SARGE 2:** Hop to it, keep it going—on your feet!

**SARGE 3:** On your toes!

**ALL 3 SARGES:** Knees up, chests out, eyes down, mouths shut!

**RECRUITS:** Knees up, chests out, eyes down, mouths shut!

**SARGE 3:** Watch your lines, keep it steady!

**SARGE 1:** Duck!

**SARGE 2:** Bob!

**SARGE 3:** Jump!

**SARGE 1:** Take it slow!

**SARGE 2:** Take it faster.

**SARGE 3:** Down and dirty.

**SARGE 1:** Keep it clean!

**SARGE 3:** Get on your feet!

**SARGE 1:** No, on your knees!

**SARGE 2:** Flat on your butts!

**SARGE 3:** Get on your backs!

**SARGE 1:** Bellies to the floor!

**SARGE 2:** Now hands and toes!

**SARGE 1:** Give me 50!

**SARGE 2:** Count it out!

**RECRUITS:** One-two-three-four!

**SARGE 3:** Give me thousands!

**SARGE 1:** Count it out!

**RECRUITS:** Five-six-seven-eight!

**SARGE 2:** You're useless!

**SARGE 3:** You're behind!

**ALL 3 SARGES:** Count it out!

**RECRUITS:** Nine-ten-eleven-twelve!

**SARGE 1:** Forget it.

**SARGE 2:** You're done.

**SARGE 3:** You failed.

**SARGE 1:** Go to bed.

**SARGE 2:** And be ready for tomorrow.

**SARGE 3:** First thing.

**SARGE 1:** To get up.

**SARGE 2:** To do it again.

**SARGE 3:** To watch out for the glass.

**SARGE 1:** To get your knees higher.

**SARGE 2:** To keep your eyes lower.

**SARGE 3:** To not get blown up.

**SARGE 1:** To keep on the line.

**SARGE 2:** To pack what you need.

**SARGE 3:** To finish the job.

**SARGE 1:** To bring home the bacon.

**SARGE 2:** To do what you're told.

**SARGE 3:** And for heaven's sake.

**SARGE 1:** For hell's sake.

**SARGE 2:** For Pete's sake.

**ALL 3 SARGES:** Keep up!

**JILL:** Well. I get the sense of danger. And pressure.

**SHOSHANNA:** Yeah. I did do one thing today, had one conversation, that was kind of... different.

**JILL:** Tell me about it.

**SHOSHANNA:** I've got this friend, Molly.

**MOLLY:** (*Entering.*) Hey, Sho-Sho.

**SHOSHANNA:** Hey. *(To JILL.)* She always calls me Sho-Sho. It's a nickname; I don't know who started it. So, today, I said to Molly... *(Turning to MOLLY.)* You know what, do me a favor? Don't call me Sho-Sho, okay?

**MOLLY:** Oh.

**SHOSHANNA:** Shoshanna. My whole name. Would you mind calling me that? I mean...

**MOLLY:** Yeah! Sure. That's cool. Do you want to call me Margaret, my whole name?

**SHOSHANNA:** If you want me to.

**MOLLY:** I don't.

**SHOSHANNA:** Then I won't.

**MOLLY:** So, yeah, cool. I might forget sometimes. I mean, I've been calling you Sho-Sho for, like...

**SHOSHANNA:** That's okay. I'll remind you.

**MOLLY:** All right. I'll see you later, Sho-Sho... Sho-shanna. 'Bye. *(MOLLY exits.)*

**SHOSHANNA:** 'Bye.

**JILL:** And now I see I owe you an apology. I've been calling you Shawna all this time, for weeks. Why didn't you tell me?

**SHOSHANNA:** Because... I didn't think it mattered to you, one way or the other.

**JILL:** Well, Shoshanna, I'm glad you told me. I'm glad you decided that it mattered.

**SHOSHANNA:** I never used to like my name until this summer.

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** Shoshanna. Shoshanna.

**SHOSHANNA:** Grandmere made me hear it a new way.

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** It's like a small wave breaking. Sho-shaaaa-na. Do you hear it?

**SHOSHANNA:** I heard it.

**GRANDMERE'S VOICE:** The ocean says your name, over and over. Sho-shaaaa-na. Sho-shaaaa-na.

**SHOSHANNA:** I heard it.

**JILL:** Your Grandmere sounds like a beautiful woman.

**SHOSHANNA:** Yeah.

**JILL:** What did she look like?

**SHOSHANNA:** Ordinary. White hair. Short. A little... I wouldn't want to show you a picture of her.

**JILL:** Why not?

**SHOSHANNA:** It wouldn't tell you anything. You'd see a grandmother, anybody's grandmother. If you want to see Grandmere, think of... fog over the water. Think of wind-chimes made of shells. Think of tiny lights, way off on the horizon.

*Visuals appear as SHOSHANNA speaks, a collection of the things she's describing. GRANDMERE'S voice repeats SHOSHANNA's name several times, fading out as the visual also fades.*

**SHOSHANNA:** Do you know what happened to her?

**JILL:** Your father sent me a link to the newspaper article.

**SHOSHANNA:** Did you read it?

**JILL:** I read that your grandmother, Beatrice, lived on the seashore in Maine, in a house that she and your grandfather built many years ago. I read that her home was swept away by the storm surge from Hurricane Shiloh, that your grandmother was almost certainly in the house at the time. *(Pause.)* You call her grandmere. Was she French?

**SHOSHANNA:** No. I just asked her if I could call her that because it meant "big sea." She said it would be all right.

**JILL:** That must have been very hard for you, not having a chance to say good-bye. *(Pause.)* What do you think Grandmere would have wanted you to do now?

**SHOSHANNA:** What do you mean?

**JILL:** What do you think Grandmere would have wanted you to do now?

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