

# Overboard

Treading water will get you nowhere.

Based on the novel by Elizabeth Fama • Adapted by Bryon Cahill  
Illustrations by Sally Wern Comport

**CHARACTERS**  
(main characters in **boldface**)

**Narrators 1, 2, 3**

**Emily**

Yaso, *a patient at the clinic*

James, *Emily's father, a doctor*

Olivia, *Emily's mother, a doctor*

Matt, *Emily's uncle*

**Emily 2**, *Emily's inner doubt*

Catherine } *a British couple*  
Richard }

Woman

**Emily 3**, *Emily's inner hope*

**Isman**, *a boy in trouble*

Man

**SCENE 1**

**Narrator 1:** In a bed in a clinic in Indonesia, a boy named Yaso has urinated on himself. His gown is soaked in the front. His sheet and mattress are soaked beneath him. An American girl named Emily is walking toward Yaso.

**Emily:** Great.

**Narrator 2:** As she pulls the sheet out from underneath Yaso, Emily realizes that she is probably the only 14-year-old in the world who can change a hospital bed with the patient in it.

**Narrator 3:** Emily turns the boy to the right side of the bed, holds him, reaches over him, untucks the sheets, rolls him back, holds him, untucks the other side, and slides the sheet out from under him. While she

puts new sheets on the bed using the same maneuvers, Yaso speaks to her.

**Yaso:** You're very strong.

**Emily:** Strong, like a bull.

**Narr 1:** Emily wrinkles her nose and makes a snorting sound. Yaso laughs.

**Yaso:** How old are you?

**Emily:** I am 100 years old.

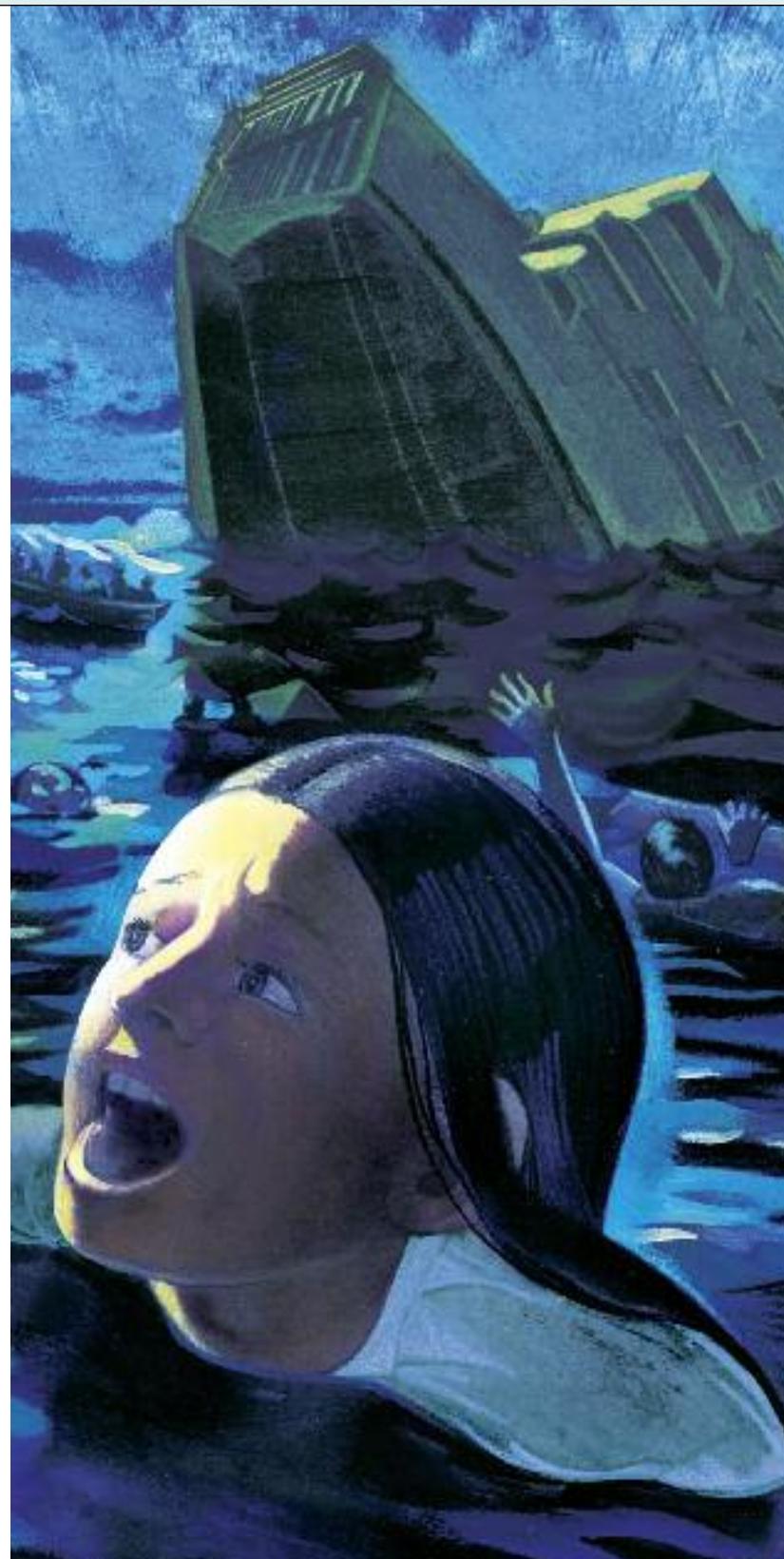
**Yaso:** You speak Bahasa Indonesia well.

**Emily:** That is because I have lived here for too long.

**Yaso:** I know you. You are the doctors' daughter. You help out here in the clinic.

**Narr 2:** Emily sighs. She holds up a new gown for Yaso.

**Emily:** Please wash yourself and put this on. Will you need help washing and dressing?



**Yaso:** I want to try by myself first.

**Emily:** I will be here if you need me.

**SCENE 2**

**Narr 3:** Later that afternoon, Emily finds her father and asks him if she has to stay.

**James:** Uh, you have to stay in Banda Aceh, yes. But you don't have to stay here in the clinic if you'd rather go to the house.

**Narr 1:** James checks his watch and rubs his eyes with his fingers.

**James:** Do you have homework you could do? Or don't you want to help more? The kids would like it if you stayed. Still, if you'd rather go home, or out with friends, that's fine too.

**Emily:** What do you mean, "out with friends"? Just which friends did you have in mind?

**James:** Em, let's not get into this again. Not here.

**Emily:** Why not here? I never see you anyplace else! How do you expect me to make friends when we move every two years?

**James:** You're going overboard again, Em.

**Emily:** Overboard? Look at this place! Why am I here? I know why you're here—to save the world. But I feel like a freak most of the time. Do you even care that I have no friends?

**James:** Whoa. No one thinks you're a freak. Everyone likes you.

**Emily:** I never asked to come here! I have nothing in common with anyone, and that's not going to change until we go home.

**Narr 2:** Emily's mother, Olivia, hears her yelling and comes to see what is wrong.

**Olivia:** Emily! What are you doing?

**Emily:** Nothing! I'm not doing anything but sweating in here.

**Olivia:** And disturbing everyone. This isn't the place for a temper tantrum. We'll discuss these issues at home. You know these kids are sick.

**Narr 3:** Emily looks around the clinic. Everyone is staring at her. She is suddenly embarrassed.

**Emily:** I'm sorry.

**Narr 1:** She is sorry she made a fuss, but also sorry for herself that she is there at all—floating alone on Sumatra.

### SCENE 3

**Narr 2:** In the evening, Emily's uncle Matt calls her on the family's cell phone. He is traveling to Weh, a nearby island, and Emily asks if she can visit him and maybe even travel back to the States with him when he goes.

**Emily:** I could live with you and help you with housework in exchange for room and board.

**Matt:** Yeah, yeah, yeah ...

**\* vocab**  
**REPRIEVE:** temporary relief

**Emily:** Just a little **reprieve**—that's all I'm asking. Just to have friends again and have a normal life.

**Matt:** Sorry, Squirt, my hands are tied. But come visit me on the island before I leave. Take the ferry.

**Narr 3:** They say good-bye to each other, and Emily hangs up the phone.

**Narr 1:** The next morning, James and Olivia are up early and frantically trying to get out the door as Emily comes down the stairs.

**Olivia:** Where is the cell phone?

**Emily:** I don't know. It's probably in my room somewhere. Matt called last night.

**James:** I got a page from the clinic 20 minutes ago, but I don't know what it's about.

**Olivia:** Come on. Let's just go. It will take longer to find the phone than it would to get to the clinic.

**Narr 2:** The three of them rush out the door and head to the clinic. When they get there, they are immediately ushered into a dying child's room. Three hours later, despite James and Olivia's efforts, the patient dies.

**Narr 3:** Her father tries to comfort Emily and tells her that there was nothing they could have done.

**Emily:** I'm so sorry about the phone.

**James:** What?

**Emily:** The phone. I'm sorry I misplaced it. Maybe ...

**Emily 2:** Who knows what we could have done with those extra 20 minutes after the clinic paged us? Is it my fault she died?

**Narr 1:** Without knowing where she is going, Emily stumbles out the door.

**James:** Emily! There is work to do!

**Narr 2:** She is gone.

### SCENE 4

**Narr 3:** One hour later, Emily is standing on the ferry and heading for Weh to meet her uncle.

**Narr 1:** There are hundreds of people on board, but Emily barely notices. She is frustrated and sad and can think only about getting away from Banda Aceh.

**Narr 2:** As the ferry pulls away, a British couple approaches Emily. Their names are Richard and Catherine. They talk to her about Indonesia and how Emily is being educated.

**Catherine:** So your parents teach you?

**Emily:** Mmm ... no. Well, yes. When they have time, I guess.

**Richard:** What year would you be in now? Tenth? Eleventh?

**Emily:** No, I'm just tall. I'm in ninth grade.

**Catherine:** Oh my! A wee babe.

**Richard:** I'll bet she speaks the local dialect fluently. Better than we can, anyway.

**Narr 3:** Suddenly, there is a jolt, and the entire ferry tilts to one



side. The change is slow at first, but after a few minutes, Emily and her new friends are noticeably on the low end.

**Catherine:** This is a lot, isn't it? This tilt?

**Narr 1:** A crew member rushes past them, telling people as he passes that everything is fine.

**Narr 2:** The ferry continues to tip in the water, and it is becoming harder and harder to stand. Emily holds tightly on to a railing. She sees a boy next to her holding on as well. He is short, and his feet are dangling in the air.

**Emily:** Oh my God, this boat is going to sink!

**Richard:** The first-class lounge is on the high side of the boat. Come on!

**Narr 3:** Richard takes his wife's hand and leads her away. Emily

remains holding on to the railing next to the boy.

**Narr 1:** The captain emerges from his quarters carrying life preservers and handing them out as fast as he can. Emily closes her eyes.

**Emily 2:** This can't be happening. What a shame, what a waste, if this boat sinks.

**Narr 2:** She opens her eyes, and the captain is now throwing the life jackets willy-nilly into a crowd of people. One of them lands on her face. She is about to put it on when she realizes that the little boy next to her is alone. She puts the jacket on him instead. And clips it tight.

**Narr 3:** Emily loses her balance and tumbles down the deck, bumping into people as she passes, unable to control her movement. She falls into an

open locker at the end of the boat. The door slams shut on her and locks. She is trapped.

**Emily 3:** Kick, Emily! Kick with all your might!

**Narr 1:** Emily kicks at the door, but nothing happens. Even worse, she is in the dark and now the locker she is trapped in is filling up with seawater.

**Emily 3:** Kick harder! Kick the door off its hinges!

**Emily 2:** It won't open. This is what it's like to die, but it will be OK. It will be quick.

**Narr 2:** The water rises and reaches her mouth, her nose, her eyes, everything. Emily gives the door one final tremendous kick, and it flies open. Holding her breath, she pushes away from the locker and swims desperately to the surface.

**Narr 3:** Above water, Emily gasps for air. She chokes and vomits. The sea is cluttered with bodies—some alive, some dead.

**Narr 1:** Emily starts to cry. The crying causes her to choke again, and she has trouble catching her breath. She starts to sink.

**Emily 3:** No! No! I won't let you drown!

**Narr 2:** She pulls herself together and gets her head above water again.

**Emily:** Idiot!

**Emily 3:** Just hold on until the rescue boats arrive.

**Narr 3:** Emily now hears an ominous groaning along with loud bubbling noises. She turns around in the water and watches as the ferry sinks.

**Emily:** Catherine! Richard!

**Richard:** Emily!

**Narr 1:** His voice is distant, but she can clearly hear him calling her name. She swims toward the sound.

**Emily:** I'm here! I'm here! It's getting too dark! Where are you? I can't find you!

**Catherine:** Over here! Swim, Emily!

**Narr 2:** She does, and soon she comes upon them.

**Catherine:** Oh, thank God you're OK! Don't worry, Emily. We've all got off the boat. We haven't sunk, and we found each other.

**Narr 3:** Richard spots a life raft and the three companions

swim toward it. When they get there, the raft is already full. A fight ensues between Richard and another man. The other man punches him and Catherine screams.

**Narr 1:** During the struggle, Emily gets caught in the middle and is pushed down under the water. She kicks with her strong legs and swims away. When she feels she is at a safe enough distance, she stops and looks back. She can barely see anything in the dark.

**Richard:** Emily, come back! Get on the raft!

**Emily:** How?

**Emily 2:** If you go back there now, you'll just cause another fight and probably get Richard killed.

**Emily:** I'll stay nearby!

**Richard:** What?

**Emily:** I'm here. Don't worry!

**Narr 2:** Richard is having trouble hearing Emily. She is drifting farther away. And she is tired. She takes off her cotton leggings, knotting them near the knees and gathering the waist into one hand like a balloon opening. She blows air into them while treading water.

**Narr 3:** Her leggings now work as a float, **rudimentary** at best, but still something to hold on to. She floats there, in the middle of the water, in the dark, spinning her body in a slow circle, looking out toward where she thought the horizon would be, searching for rescue boats that still are not there.

## SCENE 5

**Narr 1:** After an unknown amount of time goes by, Emily feels a tug from underneath her. Positive it is a shark, she begins to panic. She kicks backward in the water and splashes uncontrollably.

**Narr 2:** A woman, not a shark, appears in front of Emily. The woman is trying to hold on to her.

**Emily:** Stop! Stay away!

**Narr 3:** The woman flails. She is wearing too many clothes and is swimming inefficiently.

**Woman:** I need you ... to help me. Please, don't go away.

**Emily:** I cannot hold on to you and swim at the same time. ... But I want to help you. Take off your **sarong**.

**Woman:** You swim so well. I never learned to swim properly.

**Emily:** You must take off your sarong now! It is heavy! Then I will show you how to swim better.

**Woman:** I'm too tired.

**Narr 1:** To Emily's horror, the woman sinks under the surface of the water. She is drowning right before her eyes!

**Emily 3:** Move! Do something! Do anything!

**Narr 2:** Emily dives underwater in search of the woman. She finds her and drags her by her sarong to the surface. She lets her go, and the woman keeps her head up on her own.



**Emily:** Why did you do that? You must be very tired. And your clothes are so heavy. Everything is fine now, though.

**Narr 3:** The woman grunts.

**Emily:** OK, you must swim now. I cannot swim for us both.

**Woman:** No ... no ... no.

**Emily:** But I will show you how to swim better.

**Woman:** No!

**Emily:** It will be fine. Listen to me. You must not reach up with your arms like that. You

must keep them under the water and push them to the sides. Do you hear me?

**Woman:** I cannot. You must swim for me. I am so tired. I cannot swim anymore.

**Emily:** You must swim or you will not live!

**Woman:** Then I will not live.

**Narr 1:** The woman lets herself sink into the water again. After all her terror, she is eerily calm.

**Emily:** No! Stop!

**Narr 2:** Emily dives under once more, but the woman is gone. She cannot find her anywhere.

## SCENE 6

**Emily:** Richard! Catherine! Can you hear me?

**Narr 3:** No answer. Emily has drifted far away from them. Figuring it is better to swim toward something rather than do nothing, she settles into a steady breaststroke.

**Emily 3:** Better to swim with your head up, declaring your allegiance to the surface. Your entire world comes to this: If you stay above water, you will live.

**Narr 1:** When she does put her face in the water she can feel the ocean all around her: an enormous, undulating nothingness around her insignificant body—a black nothingness that wants to swallow her.

**Emily 2:** No, it's not nothingness at all. It's worse than that. It's the opposite of nothingness. It

is an entire world of its own, **teeming** with life. A world in which humans are unfit, poorly evolved, and laughably out of place.

**Emily 3:** Stop it, Emily! You'll drag yourself down with bad thoughts ...

**Emily 2:** So what is good about this situation?

**Emily:** Yeah, what's good?

**Emily 3:** Here's something good: You know how to swim.

**Emily 2:** That's really pitiful! Is that all you can think of? "You know how to swim!" That's like saying, "You're not dead."

**Emily:** Well, I'm *not* dead.

**Emily 2:** Not yet.

**Emily 3:** Things could be worse. You could be suffering.

**Emily:** Yes, things could be much worse.

**Narr 2:** Emily takes a moment to look up at the night sky.

**Emily:** I'm glad you're there, moon. It feels good to have you looking down on me. I know that you're looking down on my parents right now too. Maybe they're looking up at you, and you're kind of a link between us.

**Narr 3:** As Emily looks up at the moon, she starts to realize that

### vocab

**RUDIMENTARY:** imperfectly developed, primitive

**SARONG:** a printed cloth worn around the waist by both men and women

**TEEMING:** abounding or overflowing

she has many scrapes and cuts all over her, one of which is stinging her wrist under her bracelet.

**Narr 1:** She tries to change the position of her bracelet, but it keeps rubbing up against her cut and causing her pain.

**Emily:** I have to get rid of this bracelet!

**Emily 3:** You can't get rid of it! Your father gave it to you!

**Emily 2:** You don't need it. It's not helping you. Why don't you just let it go?

**Emily 3:** Well, you really like that bracelet. That's something you want to keep.

**Emily 2:** You really plan on living, don't you?

**Emily:** Yes. And I can live without it.

**Narr 2:** Emily takes off her bracelet and drops it into the ocean.

**Emily:** Dad will just have to buy me a new one. When I see him, I'll tell him so.

## SCENE 7

**Narr 3:** As the night goes on, Emily keeps swimming. She prays and thinks of home, wishing she hadn't run away. She even wonders whether her parents yet know that she is missing.

**Narr 1:** As she swims the breaststroke gently through the patchy waters, she hears something that sounds like a boy crying.

**Emily:** I'm losing my mind.

**Narr 2:** But it is real. There *is* crying somewhere near her. She stops swimming and listens **intently**. She hears the boy's cries again and swims toward them.

**Narr 3:** When she is close enough to see his face in the moonlight, she knows that he is the boy whom she put her life jacket on just before the boat sank. His name is Isman.

**Isman:** Get away from me! Go away! Go away!

**Narr 1:** Isman thrashes violently in the water, trying to escape.

**Emily:** Stop! I will not hurt you!

**Isman:** You cannot have my floaty!

**Emily:** What? Pardon me?

**Isman:** That evil man tried to steal my floaty, and Allah sent a shark after him.

**Emily:** I will not take your ... your floaty. I promise.

**Emily 3:** Oh God. Did this poor boy see a shark attack up close?

**Isman:** Yes, you will. You want my floaty.

**Emily:** I do not want your floaty. I cannot lie, I would like to have *a* floaty, but I do not want *your* floaty. I want you to have it. I think I can swim better than you, and so you need it more. Please believe me.

**Narr 2:** Isman slowly begins to believe Emily. He tells her that he keeps slipping out of his floaty, and she helps secure it around him properly.

**Isman:** Thank you. ... I'm 9 years old. How old are you?

**Emily:** I'm 14. My name is Emily.

**Isman:** I am Isman.

**Emily:** I am happy to meet you, Isman.

**Isman:** How can you be happy about anything right now?

**Emily:** I am happy to talk to someone. I have been lonely. And scared.

**Isman:** I'm not scared. I've only been worried that someone might take my floaty. I don't know how to swim well.

**Emily:** You will be fine. The boats will come to get us soon.

**Isman:** Will they? Will they save my mother and my father and my brother too?

**Emily:** I do not know. I hope so. But while we wait for the boats, we should swim.

**Isman:** I have been swimming as best as I can. What is your name again?

**Emily:** Emily.

**Isman:** Shall we ... shall I swim with you, Ehm-lee?

**Emily:** Yes, Isman. I would like to swim with you.

**Narr 3:** After a short distance, Emily realizes that Isman is a very slow swimmer. She decides that it would probably be faster for both of them if she held on to his life jacket and towed him along. As she does this, Isman goes to sleep.

**vocab**  
**INTENTLY:** with great concentration



**Narr 1:** Emily immediately misses Isman's company, but she lets him sleep as she swims for both of them.

**Emily:** I'll be sore tomorrow.

**Emily 2:** There you go again. You assume that there will be a tomorrow.

**Narr 2:** Emily begins to think about the sunrise, about how beautiful it would be.

**Emily 3:** Just wait. Any moment now, you may see light begin to filter over the ocean. Then, as the sun is close to peeking over the horizon, the dim outlines of the islands of Sumatra and Weh will appear and the water will start to glisten.

**Emily 2:** Remember the woman who drowned? What if that was Isman's mother?

**Emily:** Stop!

**Narr 3:** Emily will not allow herself such thoughts.

**Narr 1:** Two and a half hours go by and Emily is tired. Her eyes get heavy and she starts to doze. She catches herself as her face goes underwater, and she screams at her stupidity. This wakes Isman.

**Isman:** What? Do you think we are close to land? I want to see Sumatra. When will the sun rise?

**Emily:** Soon, I hope.

**Isman:** Do you think we are close to land?

**Emily:** I do not know. But if we are not, the boats will see us at the light of day.

**Narr 2:** As they continue swimming in darkness, Emily bumps into something round in the water.

**Emily:** A tomato!

**Narr 3:** She hands the tomato to Isman. He eats half, and then Emily eats the other half as Isman praises Allah.

## SCENE 8

**Narr 1:** Emily and Isman swim and swim. An eerie orange glow starts to appear on the horizon. The dim beginnings of light gradually appear and brighten. As Emily stares ahead, she can see a body in the water.

**Emily:** Here, turn around.

**Isman:** Why? What are you doing, Ehm-lee?

**Emily:** I think there is a ... a person over there.

**Isman:** Alive?

**Emily:** No.

**Isman:** Let me see. I have to see.

**Emily:** No. I have seen too many. Why must you see?

**Isman:** I *have* to see, Ehm-lee, because of my family. You don't have to come. I can swim over, take a look, and come back.

**Narr 2:** Emily understands Isman's need. She gets out of

his way, and he swims to the body and then swims back to her.

**Isman:** It's a man; it's not my father.

**Emily:** I am glad that it is not your father.

**Isman:** I don't want to sound like a baby, but I want my mother.

**Emily:** I know. You are not a baby. I want my mother too.

**Narr 3:** The sun is now bright enough for Emily to see very far. In the distance, she can make out a lump of land. Isman sees it too.

**Isman:** Ehm-lee! There's the land we're swimming for. I can almost see all of it!

**Emily:** It cannot be Sumatra or Weh. I thought it would be one of those two.

**Isman:** Oh, Ehm-lee, there are more than 17,000 islands in all of Indonesia. Why didn't we think it might be something other than Sumatra or Weh?

**Emily:** We must still swim there because it is close. I feel I can swim no longer. I am so tired and I need ... I need to sleep.

**Narr 1:** Suddenly, Emily starts to feel as if she is being pulled violently in one direction.

**Emily:** Swim, Isman! Swim now!

**Isman:** What is it? What is happening?

**Emily:** It's a whirlpool!

**Narr 2:** The whirlpool forces them around and around in a giant circle. The more they kick

against the current and try to get out, the more the whirlpool forces them back in. For what feels like forever, they are stuck in a hopeless situation.

**Narr 3:** Swimming against the current is obviously not helping. Emily has a radical idea.

**Emily:** Isman, hold on tight to my hand. We're going to swim *with* the current. On three ... one, two, three!

**Narr 1:** Emily and Isman kick with all their might. The plan works! As they move even faster with the current, the whirlpool spits them out. They are free!

**Narr 2:** Being free gives Emily little joy. They have used almost all their strength to escape the whirlpool, and now she is exhausted. Despite her best efforts not to, Emily starts to cry.

**Isman:** Ehm-lee! What's wrong? Are you hurt? We made it, Ehm-lee! You should be happy. We are alive!

**Emily:** We are dead, Isman. We are dead.

**Isman:** You're wrong, Ehm-lee. We're alive.

**Emily:** I'm so tired of living but not living. I'm tired of swimming. We have been swimming all night. How long can I do this? I am only a child!

**Isman:** You may be a child, but you're also a grown-up. When you see something is necessary, you do it. Don't give up now! We are so close! Look!

**Narr 3:** Emily looks to where Isman is pointing. He is right. The island *is* much closer. It is still very far away, but it does not seem to be impossibly out of reach.

**Narr 1:** Emily begins to swim toward the island while she pulls Isman. But she cannot do both. She is too exhausted.

**Emily:** Isman, I cannot pull you anymore. Can you swim? Swim as hard as you can!

**Isman:** Yes. Yes, I think I can.

**Narr 2:** Emily and Isman take off for the island. Emily swims much faster than Isman. At one point, she turns around to check his progress. He has stopped swimming and is drifting away from her.

**Emily:** Isman! Kick! Do not stop!

**Isman:** I can't.

**Emily:** You idiot! You baby! Swim! I beg you!

**Narr 3:** He is so far away now. He is only a speck in the distance. Emily is terrified for him as his words drift away with him.

**Isman:** You have to let me go! Then you can find me! Go to the island. Find help! Then come find me!

**Emily:** Isman!

**Narr 1:** He is gone. Emily treads water while she thinks about what to do.

**Emily 3:** Swim. Swim as hard as you can. Get to that island and save yourself. Save Isman.



**Narr 2:** Emily swims away from her friend. She swims for her life. It is the hardest thing she has ever done.

## SCENE 9

**Narr 3:** As the island gets closer and closer, Emily starts to believe that she will make it.

**Narr 1:** A wave comes up behind her and pushes her even closer. Another wave comes and slams her body forward. She hits rock. Her hand grabs hold. She hangs on with all her might as yet another wave tries to pull her back into the ocean.

**Narr 2:** Emily loses an entire fingernail on the jagged rock. She screams as she pulls herself up. She climbs, crawls, and collapses. She is so tired. She is dead tired. She knows that she must find help to save Isman. But she cannot move.

**Emily:** Isman ... Isman ...

**Narr 3:** Emily falls asleep on the rock. In her sleep, she dreams that a big man is carrying her. He takes her to a boat.

**Emily:** Isman ... Isman ...

**Man:** Isman? Who is Isman?

**Emily:** Isman. With me. Please.

**Narr 1:** Emily hears another voice saying he thinks he sees someone in the distance. Is it a dream or is it real? Emily is not sure. She closes her eyes.

**Emily:** Isman.

**Man:** We know. Rest. Just rest. We've radioed your parents. Can you hear? Emily, they're waiting; they're all waiting for you.

**Narr 2:** Emily falls asleep whispering her friend's name.

## SCENE 10

**Narr 3:** Some time later, Emily awakes. She fights to open her eyes. She is barely conscious. A warm and heavy blanket

surrounds her. She hears a voice. It is Richard's.

**Richard:** Emily. Thank God you're OK.

**Emily:** Isman ...

**Richard:** Isman is here. Can't you see him?

**Narr 1:** Emily turns her head to see Isman in the bed next to her, wrapped in a blanket of his own. His face is turned toward hers. His eyelids are half open. He finds an opening in his blanket and reaches his hand out to her. She reaches out and holds his hand in hers.

**Emily 3:** His hand is so different than I remember. It is ... dry. Finally dry.

**Narr 2:** Emily's eyes droop un-evenly and then close again. She does not let go of Isman's hand, even as she falls into a deep sleep.

**Emily:** Isman.

**Narr 3:** She rejoices in the word. ■

## TRUE STORIES

Elizabeth Fama's novel, *Overboard*, is based on a true story about a 1996 ferry accident off the coast of Sumatra.

Her story reminds us of a similar story about the tempestuous sea. On Dec. 26, 2004, a disaster of a different nature occurred, also near Sumatra. In the Indian Ocean, an underwater earthquake caused a number of tsunamis that hit 11 countries, including Indonesia, killing more than 225,000 people.