

Setting Sail

Alveyn woke up to a bark from Aries. Aries was going to Alveyn's scavenge partner that night and his bark was a way of saying, "Good evening!" Alveyn got up and looked in the still water of a small pond, settling their thoughts for the day. They pulled their hair into a braid. Their warm brown skin, almost the shade of the trees around them, was stretched into the smile that they wore so often. They wore clothes that were too big and patched with sturdy boots covering holey socks. Alveyn double-checked their pack, and they were ready to go.

Alveyn hopped onto Aries' back, wolves being their usual mode of transport. Aries raced through the forest, crossing the whole island in minutes. Alveyn often wished they were a real wolf, especially in times like this. Being the only gnome in the wolf pack, Alveyn often felt separate. However, while Alveyn felt separate, they couldn't change their species, and instead wished to leave the island, but the ocean stood like a wall, consuming all thoughts of crossing it.

Alveyn was brought back to the present when Aries stopped, signaling that they had reached the top of the cliff. Alveyn climbed down the cliff, careful not to look at the frothing sea below.

Once they reached the bottom, they leaped from the cliff to the shipwreck. Before they entered the boat, they looked out over the usually terrifying sea, but today the clear sky made it beautiful. Alveyn could see a brown speck, crossing the water. A boat! Alveyn knew boats went on the water, but they had never thought about using boats to cross the water. *Wait! Boats can cross the water, with a boat I could cross the water*, they thought, their mind spinning with the possibility of leaving the island.

What am I thinking? I wouldn't survive without the pack, and I can't leave my friends!

Alveyn dismissed the idea of leaving the island, but it never fully left their mind.

Alveyn walked into the boat and, after poking around a little, hunted along the walls for the secret treasure storytellers always speak of. When Alveyn was feeling along a wall, they found a large rectangular seam that, with some pressure, swung open to reveal a hallway which Alveyn walked through. Here Alveyn stopped and, to test, pushed the door closed. Then they walked down they found a room, but before they took another step they could hear the water on the other side of the closed door. *Oh no no!* Alveyn thought. The ocean had rushed up, filling the other room, and wanted, pushed, and pried, trying to get into the room with Alveyn. Overcome with fear, Alveyn looked around the room for anything that could save them.

Alveyn looked at the door again, and they could tell that it was giving way as the water rushed in, pooling at Alveyn's feet. As it sloshed around Alveyn, it seemed to be saying *I got in! There was nothing you could do.* Alveyn knew they had to get out.

The water was still rushing in, more, more, more until Alveyn was ankle-deep. Alveyn couldn't swim out, and the ocean's crashing was too loud for Aires to hear them. Alveyn decided the only choice was to wait for the water to take them. Waiting for the water to take them was long and boring, giving them lots of time to look at their surroundings.

Alveyn stood in the sleeping area of the ship, which was apparent from the rotting cots tossed around the floor. The wooden floor was covered in moss growing in and around the cracks. The smell from the rotting room and salty ocean made the air feel thick. Alveyn was now acutely aware of the stench and it enveloped them, thickening around them. Hoping for fresher air, Alveyn looked out the window. Through the window, Alveyn could see the rain hitting the sea like little bullets, shooting down before being absorbed by the waves. The rain thundered

against the ocean. Pushed against the wall near the window Alveyn was looking out of, there was a set of drawers. The wood was scratched and it was missing some drawers. Instead, the dresser was dark from dirt and water, and it slightly tilted to one side from some of the drawers caving in. Alveyn approached the drawers and, as they walked, their shoes filled with water, squelching when they stepped.

Once they got to the dresser, they opened it. The drawers hadn't been touched for a long time, as despite the moistness of the wood, it still screeched when Alveyn pulled the first drawer. Inside there was a pile of decaying fabric. The next drawer caved in, and when Alveyn reached their hand in, the splinters seemed to fly out of the wood and into Alveyn's open palm. The last intact drawer held a bright pink bubble. Alveyn pulled it out, finding there were two matching pieces. The pieces were bright pink and unnatural. It was like a combination of balloons and donuts. Unlike the balloon, the plastic making these was thick and unpopable. The shape looked like a donut, with a hole big enough to fit their arm through.

Then Alveyn saw it. A spider crawled out of the hole, its legs long and spindly, ready to crawl all over Alveyn. When Alveyn saw the spider, they squealed and dropped the donut, letting it fall into the water. If Alveyn was dropped in the water, they would have sunk instead the tube floated. Alveyn picked it up, carefully checking that the spider had fallen off and making sure not to get water on their hand. Alveyn tried again. This time they threw both tubes hard at the water, which was now up to Alveyn's shins, and again both objects floated. Then, Alveyn had an idea. A weird, crazy, imaginative, unlikely idea. *If these tubes float, then if I wore the tubes, would I float?* Alveyn wondered. *No harm in trying. The water is taking a long time anyway.* Alveyn donned the floating tubes and stepped through the doorway and into the ocean. The ocean was mean and cold. Very cold. Alveyn was tossed around, like how the baby wolves play with their

dinner. Then, having seen the wolves swim, Alveyn kicked and thrashed their arms and legs, all the while running out of air. The floaties worked wonders, pulling Alveyn up to the surface, despite the jerking movements they were doing.

Now that Alveyn was out of the waterlogged ship, they were standing at the beach looking out over the sea that had so nearly drowned them. The weather had changed drastically, going from beautiful sun to rain and harsh weather then back to a beautifully warm and clear day. Alveyn looked over the sea, which the pirates must have crossed then pulled out their spyglass, hoping to see more than the endless blue. In the spyglass, they could just make out land! They put the spyglass away, not yet sure what to make of it, but their brain was thinking. That morning as Alveyn cooked their meal, surrounded by the wolves, eating it raw, they told their pack about their plan.

The next night Alveyn and Libra set off to the shipwreck. As soon as they arrived, Alveyn climbed down the cliff face. Alveyn didn't enter the ruined ship. Instead, they hunted around the wreck for building materials for their raft. They started near the boats, able to pull some wood off the ruined ships. As Alveyn was picking up the wood, they looked out to the sea and saw a small boat paddling toward them. Alveyn, never having seen a boat cross the ocean, was uneasy and ran to the cliff face, hiding in a crevice. The boat eventually reached the shore, and the captain hopped out and onto the thin beach. Then the captain looked up at the cliff face, clearly intimidated by the looming wall of rock. They looked at the other sides of the beach, which seemed to go on forever, slightly slanted, and presumably met up with the island. The captain was stuck. They put their head into their hands and sat, not looking up. Alveyn realized the boat was unguarded. Alveyn looked over at the captain's boat, which was made beautifully of polished cedar, and Alveyn had seen how easily it was able to cut through the waves. Alveyn

looked back at the captain, too demoralized to notice a little gnome sneaking over to the boat.

Alveyn looked back at the boat, looked at the captain, looked at the boat, and climbed the cliff.

At the top, Alveyn found a sturdy tree stump, tied the end of their rope around the stump, then threw the other end of the rope down, hitting the captain in the head. Alveyn peeked over the cliff, calling down, "Come up!" Up the captain climbed, and as she got closer, Alveyn noticed an empty flask fastened to her belt. Alveyn pulled the rope as the captain climbed the rope, them both working together to bring the captain to the top.

When the captain was at the top, she collapsed to the ground, panting. This concerned Alveyn as they had never seen anyone this exhausted before.

Alveyn hopped around the captain, trying to wait patiently for the captain to catch her breath. "Here, let me help you," Alveyn said, their words rushing out, hoping that picking up the captain's things would make the captain ready to talk sooner.

"Wh- who are- who are you?" the captain asked in between breaths, looking up at Alveyn. The captain was a human and carried a pack. The backpack was too small to be full of tradeables and must have only had camping gear.

"I'm Alveyn! Who are you?" Alveyn asked eager to learn more about the captain.

The captain stood up, dusting themselves off. "I'm Peri. I come from a village called Senza," Peri replied.

"I've never been to the big island, but I want to!" Alveyn exclaimed, acting as if Peri was someone they had known their whole life. If Peri was from the main island and had a boat, could they help Alveyn get to the main island? Deciding the best way to get help is to give help, Alveyn snatched Peri's hand saying, "Come on, I'll show you my home! It's not far, I promise!"

Alveyn lead Peri into the woods and while they were talking they told Peri of their dream to leave the island.

Peri agreed to help Alveyn build a boat in exchange for help finding a special type of sap for a potion to heal her village. Luckily for Peri, Alveyn knew the woods very well, and after being given a brief description of what the sap looked like, Alveyn was able to fill a water flask with it. Then Peri helped Alveyn make a boat. Peri had her boat, and they were able to base Alveyn's boat off of it, using the wood Alveyn had already gathered.

Alveyn then went home to say goodbye to their pack, and prepare to leave. Alveyn told their pack their story, describing their new boat. The whole pack was excited, and a smaller wolf, too small to ride, named Pluto volunteered to go with Alveyn across the sea.

That evening, Alveyn woke up Pluto and they walked off to the cliff. Alveyn and Pluto had to go the long way down to the beach because Pluto couldn't climb. When they reached the bottom, Alveyn could see that Peri had left, and then they remembered the envelope. They opened it and read the letter. It read: *Thank you for the sap! I have set off to my village, and attached are instructions on what to do when you reach the main island.* They then used the paddle and began the journey to their new home.