

PROMPT #3: Your main character has been stranded on a desert island for months. Alone... or so they thought. One morning, they wake up to a message written in the sand.

Sailing Away

by **Madeline DelHomme**

If you were stranded on a deserted island, what two things would you bring? The age old question. Some people might say a lighter, duct tape, a tent, or if you're really cheesy, a good time. I'm stuck here with nothing and I'm especially not having a good time.

It's been three months since I've been stuck here on this abandoned island. I became a sailor thinking I'd get the chance to explore the world, a chance to find new and lost things, but the only place I'm exploring is this lonely, forgotten island. A nasty storm broke my boat where I drifted all the way to this deserted island. I have no idea where I am and have no way to get back to civilization.

Everyday for these three months has been the same. Get food, get water, get sleep. There's not much else, believe it or not, to do on a deserted island. I wake up and stroll along the beach, looking for some coconuts and fishing off the coast. Sometimes a seagull will fly over and I'll try to knock it out of the sky with rocks. It usually goes flying in a different direction while the gull takes off, but when I do manage to strike one down, it makes for a nice dinner.

Between meals, life gets boring. No one to talk to or keep you company. No card games or anything fun. I'll usually fix up the little shelter I made for myself. The roof constantly needs patching and I don't have much of a floor.

Another thing that helps pass the boredom is sleep, something that I've found myself doing more. Who knew being on a deserted island would fix my sleep schedule. I end my day by going to the makeshift hut I built, sleeping with dreams of leaving this place once and for all.

The sun shines through the hole in my roof. I should probably fix that today. As I stand up, my back aches from sleeping on the hard ground. I try to stretch it out, twisting my back in every direction possible, but nothing really seems to work. I walk out of my tiny hut and hobble over to the beach to hopefully find something good for breakfast.

It's barely morning but the air is already steaming. The sand feels good between my toes, it's a feeling that I will never get tired of even after months of walking in it. I look around, trying to spot my next meal, when something on the sand catches my eye. *SOS get me off this island*

Did I write that? I don't remember doing something like that. Maybe I did it in my sleep. But I've never slept walked in my life before.

Maybe I wrote without realizing it. And it's not like the message is wrong, I do need to get off this island. So I left it there and continued my hunt for breakfast.

The next few days were the same. I'd wake up, go to the beach to find food, and see writing in the sand. Each day the message would change, but they would all have the same intent. All were cries for help. I could never recall when and if I wrote it. I had to have been writing them, I was the only person here.

Unless there was someone else. But that was impossible, I would have run into them by now. How hard is it for two people to be living on an island without seeing each other?

These notes kept appearing consistently. I came to the conclusion that it wasn't me who was writing them because I could never remember writing a single one of them. It has to be someone else. I was no longer as lonely as I once thought. It felt strange to suddenly know someone else was on this deserted island. The only real way to meet this stranger, if there even was somebody else, is to inspect the whole island to find them.

Absolutely nothing is on this island except for me. Aside from the occasional sea bird and fish that live along the coast. The sun beams down on the beach, never taking a break until night. Hot is an understatement with the only escape being under the trees more inland, but neither are barriers against the humidity. I walk around the dense jungle, looking for any other signs of life, any chance I might not be alone. But everywhere I look, all I see is sun, trees, and water. Every corner of this forsaken island has seen me, except this other person. I didn't think the island was this large. Apparently I was wrong, it is large enough to play hide and seek with a stranger.

Searching for this stranger reminded me of how I got stranded here in the first place.

Growing up in a small coastal town meant that I was always surrounded by boats and water. My father, fitting enough, was a sailor. If I wasn't at home or at school, I was on a boat with him. All my life all I've ever cared about was what kind of fish we were eating for dinner and when I could go out on the boat next.

I always thought I had a good childhood. I was raised on my mother's excellent cooking and stern looks, and my father's playfulness and odd household chores. He would chipperly ask my help to rehang a hook on the wall by holding up a flashlight and then end up screaming in anger at whatever he was doing. He was a sailor, so he would use the most foul language regardless if I was in earshot. That was how I always remembered him.

Then one cold fall evening, someone came knocking on our door. Expecting my dad, my mother answered it only to start bawling her eyes out. I stared at her, too young at the time to understand. All I wanted to do was to see my dad, eat dinner with him, and maybe go help him fix something else in the house. I never saw him again after that night, and I wouldn't realize it till much later.

Suddenly my mother was against me going out for boat rides. She would tell me to stay away from the harbor or the water would eat me up. Countless days I remember being dragged into the house crying because she wouldn't let me get on another boat, unable to understand why because I wanted to be a sailor just like my dad.

I got my wish in the end, just without her permission.

Maybe I should have listened to her.

Hopefully I'm not lost, I've never been to this side of the island. All the trees and shrubbery looks the same, so maybe I'm just going in circles. I kept searching until I arrived at my makeshift house. I was going in circles after all. Everything on this island looks the same anyways. I enter my house, only to realize that this is not my house. The roof doesn't have a hole in it like mine, and the ground is covered in leaves, making the ground feel softer.

I wasn't hallucinating. The person who built this hut must have been the one writing messages in the sand. Relief crashed over me knowing I wasn't hallucinating or sleep walking. Now all I have to do is wait here until the owner comes back.

Hours passed and night came. Still no one showed up. Tired from all the wandering I did around the island, I dozed off and fell asleep in this other hut.

I woke up, forgetting that I had slept in the stranger's hut. It still looked like no one had come through. I stood up, my back ached a little less. I should really work on making my floor softer like this.

I step outside to the sun shining brightly in the sky. Time to look for breakfast. I found my way to the beach, but it was on the opposite side of the island than where my hut is. I can't believe I never thought to come to this side of the island.

I stroll on the sand as usual, looking for a meal, when a bright shine is coming from off shore. A small boat is bobbing up and down on the waves. Finally! A chance to get off this dreaded island.

I sprint to the shoreline, abandoning any thoughts of breakfast. I shout as loud as I can and jump up and down to get his attention, but nothing seems to be working. Then I realize that the boat isn't moving towards the island, but away. I'm too late, I wail in distress. The one glimmer of hope for getting off this island is sailing away.

I collapse in a puddle of my own tears. Defeated knowing I wasn't being rescued, I stared at the boat. The glare from the sea burns my eyes, but I can't get myself to look away. The man on the boat is like me. Weathered, unkept, and tired. The same sunken eyes and dry lips characterize his face. Knotted and overgrown hair covers his body. It almost looks familiar, like I've seen this man in my life before.

Because I have. How could I mistake his face for anyone else. It was my father sailing away.