

Message in a Bottle

By Mahalia Solages

My paper is torn in four sections....

Section one:

I have no idea where I am. I'm petrified and it's still daylight. From where I sit on this small section of latte colored sand, I could see both sides disappear behind jagged steep mountainsides that would force me out to sea to swim around. I don't know how deep or how rough the current is. It's quiet except for the waves creeping up with every cycle. There are sea grape trees, coconut, and mango and palm trees densely packed like spaghetti in a box behind me, where I could climb some roots jutting out like handles of the crumbly chalky mountainside. The beach is relatively clean aside from some patches of seaweed and some beached jellyfish. The water is aqua at the edge, the sand fading until the water changes to azure-how that will help anyone to find me as it resembles every beach...maybe I'm already hysterical.

Section two:

I counted four hundred and eight one steps from one side of this beach to the next. I tried to swim out on either side however both sides created a swirl effect, pushing me off the large amoeba shaped algae slimed boulders I used as stepping stones. I could have drowned, the current was unrelenting. Some moss covered sections provided minimal protection for my hands as I gripped the sides of the mountain and then. There. Was. Nothing. More jagged coastline, even less trees. The heat exacerbated my hunger. The 'swim' was refreshing but I decided to climb the roots to get to the mango trees. I was impressed with my leg strength and survival mode.

The lizards kept scaring me. Every rustle of the leaves had me cringing. Some mangoes were already on the floor, sections eaten by rats. I ate the other side, wiping dirt with my shirt. I ripped low palm trees branches and braided them together. I spent hours creating a fort two branches wide per wall and six for my roof. I used six plantain leaves on my roof so the groove could catch some rain or morning dew and pour into my bottle. There are birds, and lots of lizards, but nothing else. There are no paths, but there are mud puddles, at least indicating that

it has rained. I have placed my fort between two mango trees hoping the shade will create a cooler evening. I found bananas which look just like plantain trees one hundred steps left of my fort, and I have found a few almond trees eighty steps away from my fort, away from the water. The mosquitoes are brutal but I have found a citrus type weed by accident as I was pushing foliage away and counting steps. I think it is lemon balm. I am so thirsty I am rationing my dew water which is about half a cup daily.

Section three:

My name is Elizabeth Bruno. I am 37 years old and this adventurous idea has gone terribly wrong. I live in Fort Lauderdale. I have a sister Michele Crane, in North Carolina. She is younger, married, and has two children. My parents live in Englewood, New Jersey. I have a best friend named Soraya Benson in Fort Lauderdale. I am an executive accountant for a large office supply chain. This trip was a gift to me -a ten year ritual of traveling alone for my birthday. I was kayaking as a day expedition and then...I don't know what happened to the others that came out with me, there is no sign of them.

Section four:

I have spelled the word HELP made of seaweed, stones and banana leaves on the beach. A waterproof bag swept ashore with beef jerky and small bottle of water making my conundrum bearable for two more days. No sign of life. The stillness of the days is nerve wrecking. I am on a leave of absence from my job. Lying here in this dug out cradle of dirt lined with leaves, I inhale the earth. My lemon balm bracelets and bandana provide a soothing aroma and repellent and at this point I can tune out the crickets. I am scared. Not because of these conditions, rather I have no one who waits for me at home if I were to be found. I am surviving for what? To go back to my 80 hour work week? To another happy hour with my other single friend? To an empty house? I have filled the areas of my house with the many colorful trinkets of my travels and yet it still screams white noise. I never realized I was dying lost until now, when I am lost, dying. I actually have many regrets and I kept rationalizing, excusing my choices based on other people's experiences with life, kids, social life. "See this is why I don't have kids." I used to laugh at friends who were picking up toys or crumbs. "Oh hell no, I just don't see doing that to myself." I used to say when I saw a pregnant woman in her final stretch. Yet, I found myself staring and listening to the stories of birth and watching romantic comedies. Too much

time has passed and I am well too into my ways now. I'm not sure I could change. My demands are too high. I was always too busy moving forward. Forward to attain what? A first class ticket to a fabulous getaway-with great shots, and bragging rights about not being tied down? Yay for me. Hey whoever finds this; tell my acquaintances and friends that I finally lost those ten pounds! To my parents, sorry. The fact that I have survived what appears to be twenty three days based on my slashes on the mango trunk is the most impressive thing I've done in years!

To rescue!

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