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Island In Time
by Wayne A. English

It is 1576 and the Spanish Carrack *Isabel* has hit a submerged rock in the Amazon River and is taking water. Her carpenter can't remove the rock. A diver goes over the side with an iron bar. The rock and diver are never seen again.

Isabel must get to anchorage or go to the bottom. Finding anchorage in a small island cove, strange things begin to happen. The men's beards don't grow. A new tattoo fades away. The *Isabel* is never heard from again.

* * *

A year later Captain Gill is with the Admiral at the port of San Juan when is ordered to take his ship, the Carrack *Anna*, into the Amazon River to find the *Isabel*.

Captain Gill takes the *Anna* into the Amazon River and begins their search. Seeing a barrel floating they investigate and find that it has a canon tethered to it. Soon others are found and *Isabel*'s wreckage is found in a cove on an island.

From shore an Indian woman watches the big canoe, as she calls ships, come into the cove and ground itself hard on the beach. She knows what the island will do to the crew.

From astern the watch hells, "Wave." The Pororoca¹ is coming upon them and fast. It's wave will push the *Anna* into the cove at a speed that is too fast to be controlled safely. And it does. The *Anna* is marooned with no help to be had.

Soon strange things come to pass: men's beards stop growing, a sailor's tattoo fades, at the near by wreck of the *Isabel*, sailor's clothing is found containing the bones of children. *Anna*'s

crew becomes close to panic and a radical solution is found. The stern castle will be torn off and discarded. Hopefully that will lighten the ship enough so that the tide will float her because as she sits now her bow is high on the shore and stuck fast.

The men begin work. Even the cabin boy helps where he can, but to no avail. All the men die. The boy, the only survivor, is taken by the Indian woman to be cared for and raised as her son. The son she always wanted.

1) The Pororoca is a tidal bore, with waves up to 4 m (13 ft) high, that travels up to 800 km (500 mi) upstream on the Amazon River and its tributaries.

Island In Time

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Isabel was in trouble. Sailing the Amazon River by moonlight, she hit an underwater rock. Damaged, she was taking on water. Worse, the rock embedded itself in her hull, and the carpenter couldn't dislodge it. His temporary repairs would never get them home. She must get to shore, or go to the bottom.

It was May in the year of our Lord 1576, and every man aboard prayed for salvation. They were alone on the Amazon River with no help to be had. They were on their own.

The first officer went below decks. He spoke to the carpenter.

"Can you get it out?" Shouting to be heard over the men shifting cargo.

"No, sir. I damn well can't," the carpenter shouted. Then swore in three languages. "The devil couldn't of stuck it better." The carpenter barked between blows of his hammer as he

pounded the boulder. He stopped talking. Looked at Mr. Soto, saying, “Diver? From the outside? Maybe?”

“I’ll see to it,” The first officer said, as he walked away.

With that, the carpenter mumbled, “May God protect him.” Knowing his chances were lousy at night, in a river filled with fish big enough to kill a man, or strip his flesh to the bone.

The diver went over the side carrying an iron bar. Ship’s lights cast feeble light as he took several breaths and disappeared below. The rock was dislodged. Rock and diver were never seen again.

Below deck, men cheered as the rock disappeared. The clouds parted, bathing *Isabel* in moonlight. The captain ordered minimum sail as she limped away looking for an anchorage.

Dawn found her barely making way when the watch in the crow’s nest shouted. “Island, sir. Off the starboard quarter. Here’s your heading,” as he pointed with fingers and thumb together.

Below deck, the carpenter said, “Thank God.” His crew manning the pumps agreed. They knew *Isabel* would not stay afloat another day.

“Helm, shift your rudder,” the Captain said. “Take us three points to starboard¹. Gently, helm. Gently.”

“Sir,” was the terse reply as *Isabel* began her turn to starboard, pointing her bow toward the island just coming into view from the poop deck.

The captain and first officer looked at the island some miles away.

The first officer shouted to the watch. “Do you see an anchorage?”

The answer came back. “Looks like the entrance to a cove, sir. Can’t be sure.”

The Captain touched Mr. Soto’s arm. They walked to where they would not be overheard. “If that anchorage proves out, we take it.” The Captain said. “If not, we sail to the other side. We must hope for something there.”

“Agreed, sir,” the first officer replied. “God smiles on, sir. An island’s not likely to be inhabited.”

The captain nodded. “We’re in no shape to fight off headhunters and repair the ship,” he agreed.

Just then, a sailor arrived. “Begging your pardon, sirs. The carpenter wants to see the first officer below. Says right away. He says.”

¹There were 36 points in a Spanish compass. This would be 30 degrees in a modern compass.

The first officer went below.

“Found more damage,” the carpenter said. “Besides the planks that fucking rock cracked a frame, sir. Can’t fix it in the water. Got to get to shore sir. Or we’re going to the bottom afore sunset.”

The first officer nodded and, without a word, went to see the captain.

“Captain, the carpenter found a damaged frame. If we don’t get to anchorage, we’ll be on the bottom by sunset.”

To lighten the ship, the captain ordered her port-side cannon to be tied to barrels and put over the side. They would recover them later.

The watch in the crow’s nest was right. There is an entrance to a cove.

Isabel sailed in, and near shore, dropped anchor.

Then the crew began moving cargo to her starboard side to prepare for rolling her damaged port side out of the water.

She would never be heard from again.

* * *

A Year Later

San Juan Pueblo (Modern Day San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Isabel’s sister ship, *Anna*, was tied up at the quay taking on supplies after her mission protecting galleons carrying gold and silver to Spain.

Diago, one of *Anna’s* seaman was getting a tattoo. His name, and a whore named Luzia, inside a heart. Like a married couple, which they were not. That Diago was hungover did nothing to improve the situation. Worse, it allowed the tattooer to use a filthy needle.

Luzia saw it. “That needle....”

The tattooer ignored her.

“The needle?” She repeated.

“You his priest? Shut your yap.”

Luzia left.

Diago and his new tattoo ambled off to find *Anna*. He forgot all about Luzia and the tattoo when he realized his ship was gone. Stopping dead in his tracks, he looked around with bleary eyes. The ocean’s gone, too. Someone stole it, he thought. Then the world came back into focus, and he began walking toward the sea, laughing to himself.

Diago found the main street and the ocean. Smiling at the thought that someone returned it. And there was *Anna*, tied up at the quay. He walked her way. It was time to get aboard.

* * *

Anna's Captain was with the Admiral.

The Admiral was saying to Captain Gill, "There are no more galleons to be escorted. You're to look for the *Isabel*. She's a year overdue."

"Where was she sent and what was her mission, sir?" Captain Gill asked.

"She was to map the Amazon up to 20 days' sail inland, or as far as depth permitted. We sent her over a year ago and haven't heard from her. You are to find her and complete her mission."

"Sir," the Captain said, "*Anna's* the same size as *Isabel*. Wouldn't a smaller ship be better able to deal with the shallows?"

"You have your orders, captain. Questions?"

"None, sir."

"When can you sail?"

"With tomorrow's tide, sir."

"Good, be back in six or seven months. Dismissed."

The Captain Gill left. The Amazon, he thought, in a Carrack. Dear God, what have I done to deserve this? The only good thing is that I'm up for promotion after this stinking mission, he thought, as he walked back to *Anna*.

* * *

Diago walked to the ship's gangway and went aboard. Mr. Soto, the first officer, was passing. Seeing Diago and the state he was in, he smiled. Diago was his best sailor and one that Mr. Soto liked.

"Get married, Diago?" Mr. Soto asked with a smile.

"Sir?" Diago said, wondering what he was talking about. Unsteady on his feet.

Mr. Soto nodded, pointed with his chin. "New tattoo. Luzia and Diago in a heart. Did you get married?" Mr. Soto said, his grin getting wider.

"Married sir? Ah, um, not that I recall... sir."

"Get some sleep, Diago. I hear our orders have changed."

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Changed, sir?”

“The *Isabel*’s overdue. I hear we’re going to the Amazon to look for her.”

“The Amazon? That hellhole. Begging your pardon, sir,” Diago said. “There be snakes, gators, piranha.”

“Didn’t I tell you to get some sleep?” Mr. Soto said. Not believing him.

“You did, sir. Thank you, sir.” Diago laid down on the deck and began snoring. Captain Gill came aboard while Diago slept.

“Captain, our orders?” Mr. Soto asked.

“It’s what we heard,” he said, shaking his head. “We’re for the Amazon. Looking for the *Isabel*. She’s a year overdue. We are to report back here in six or seven months. And to complete her mapping mission.”

Mr. Soto exhaled. “Yes sir.”

“I know how you feel. I agree. It’s no place to look forward to. How are the provisions and weapons?”

“Good, sir. Food is accounted for. Biscuit, wine, water, horse beans, chick peas, rice, oil, salt pork, cheese. And some of the good stuff for officers. And sir, four bottles of sherry. Extra clothes, rope and line, anchors. Weapons, powder, cannonballs. All onboard. We can sail with tomorrow’s tide.”

Nodding his approval, “See that the crew’s aboard. And bring aboard four casks of scrap metal. Anything the cannons can fire and two additional barrels of powder and matches for the cannon.”

“I’ll see to it, sir. Shall I tell Mr. Alvarez?”

The Captain shook his head. “No. Ask him to see me at his earliest convenience.” Knowing Alvarez would come to him anyway - to complain.

“One more thing - your son. I ran into an old friend of mine. He’s captain of *Ynez* and bound for Spain in ten days. He’ll see the boy safely home. If that be your wish.”

The captain’s words touched Mr. Soto. “Thank you, sir. I appreciate your kindness. There’s no home for him, sir. It’s just us.”

“Of course. Please forgive me, Mr. Soto... I... did not know.”

“Nothing to forgive, sir. Thank you for thinking of him.”

“That will be all.”

“Very well, sir,” Mr. Soto said, as he left.

Finding Mr. Alvarez, Mr. Soto told him the captain wanted to speak to him

* * *

The next day, *Anna* sailed with the tide.

“Don’t talk stupid, Ramone,” Diago said.

“The Amazon is bad luck,” Soto continued. “You knows it well as I do. Should of stayed in San Juan.”

“Desert, go on, swim for it,” Diago said with an evil grin. “Still within sight of land.”

“What da ya use for brains?” Ramone snapped. “Goat shit? No thanks. We be lookin’ for a death ship. Like as not on the bottom. Ain’t returned has she?”

“Of course she ain’t returned,” Diago said. “If she did, we’d not lookin’ for her. Would we? Shut your face and get to work.”

Ramone, seeing he was getting nowhere, kept quiet and went back to untangling rope.

* * *

18 Days Later

The Amazon River

Mr. Soto and the captain were in the captain’s quarters.

“Mr. Soto, please have the men clean and sharpen their weapons. From now on, no one is to be unarmed on duty,” the Captain said. “And load the port and starboard cannon closest to the bow with the metal you brought aboard from the casks.”

“Sir?”

“The Indian’s, Mr. Soto. They’ll kill us on sight. We must be ready.”

Mr. Soto blanched. “Understood, sir.”

The captain nodded. “When we’re within range of bowshot, no one is to expose himself. They dip their arrowheads in poison. No one survives.”

“I’ll pass the word, sir.”

“Mr. Soto.”

“Sir?”

“Keep the ship in the center of the river and away from shore. You haven’t been here before. There’s a wave. Indians call it Pororca. It’s tidal, fast, and can carry trees. It can put holes in our hull.” He paused. “Keep watch abaft. Should it overtake us, the river will flow upstream. Get everyone out of the rigging and say a prayer. It can lift Anna like a toy.”

“But, sir. We’re a thousand ton.”

“Be that as it may, should it overtake us, we must hope it doesn’t throw us into the jungle or hull us.”

“Sir,” Mr. Soto said. Knowing why the captain had this conversation in private.

The captain continued, “Until we’re out of the river, one of us must always be on duty.”

“Agreed, sir.”

As Mr. Soto was leaving, the navigator, Mr. Alvarez arrived to speak with the captain.

“Mr. Soto,” Alvarez said, in greeting.

“Mr. Alvarez,” Mr. Soto answered, as he went forward.

“Captain,” Mr. Alvarez said, “may I use Diago and Ramone for an hour? I need to record the ship’s speed in the river.”

“Of course. Have them report to Mr. Soto when your work is complete.”

“Very good, sir,” Alvarez said in his pleasant voice.

The Captain nodded, dismissing him.

The navigator collected the two sailors, and the three of them went aft.

“Throw the line overboard so I can count the knots.” Mr. Alvarez ordered in his condescending voice. “That’s not too difficult, is it, barber?” He said, addressing Ramone.

“No, sir,” Ramone said, opening the hatch.

Then Diago threw the line and chip overboard, as Mr. Alvarez started his half-minute sand glass and counted the knots as the rope played out.

They were making about two knots against the Amazon’s current.

“Pull the line in,” Mr. Alvarez ordered the experienced sailors, as he noted the results. They wondered what he expected them to do.

“See Mr. Soto when you’re finished,” Mr. Alvarez ordered, walking away.

“Yes, sir.” The men answered.

As Mr. Alvarez stalked off to record the information in the logbook and then to determine *Anna*’s location, direction, and speed.

“Lovely man,” Ramone said.

“He is that. A pity we’ve no more like him,” Diago said, not meaning a word of it.

“A pity that he’s no more,” Ramone whispered.

“I didn’t hear that, my friend. Make damn sure that no one does.”

The captain saw Mr. Alvarez and hailed him. “Mr. Alvarez, how do we go?”

Alvarez shook his head. “We’re barely making two knots. From now on, we’re against the current. I don’t see how we can search and map in six or even seven months.”

“I agree. We’ll complete our rescue mission and do the mapping on the way back. We’ll do the best we can in the time we’re ordered to stay here.”

Alvarez looked relieved. “That’s good, sir. I thought we’d be here two years. One thing, sir. The river is tidal. We’ll have to be careful of our position when the tide goes out so we don’t get stranded.”

“You’re quite correct. So, map our position as many times every day as you can.”

Mr. Alvarez took a breath....

“I know, Mr. Alvarez,” Captain Gill said, “I expect you to do the best you can. I ask for nothing more.”

“Thank you, sir. If I may, sir, I’ve calculations to make.”

“Carry on, Mr. Alvarez.”

Walking to his quarters, Alvarez found the boy, cuffed him and sent him sprawling. “Out of my way,” he spat. Then kicked him.

The boy lie there. As everyone, even Mr. Soto, ignored him. It was not possible for the first officer to show concern, especially to his son. And he didn’t.

Some men took pleasure in the boy’s misery. Ramone was one such man. Diago was not. An orphan since birth, Diago knew what it was to be alone in the world. Ramone came from a good family and joined the *Anna* as an qualified sailor. Diago worked his way up from cabin boy and took his share of beatings. He walked to the boy.

“Come, lad, you ain’t bad hurt,” he whispered. “Go below for a bit.”

The boy knew better than to say thank you else Diago could be punished. He nodded and went below.

Ramone and Diago found Mr. Soto, the first officer..

“You wished to see us, sir?” Ramirez said.

“The two of you get some supper,” Mr. Soto said. “Then, Ramirez, go forward and relieve the man on the sounding line. If any fish have been caught take them below before taking over the line. Diago, see to our grenades and fuses.”

“Yes, sir,” they said together.

* * *

Two Weeks Later

“Captain, barrel afloat, sir. Dead ahead.” The watch in the crow’s nest called.

The captain opened his glass and looked. Indeed, there was a barrel floating on the flood.

“Mr. Soto,” the Captain Gill said. “Slow the ship. We’ll take it aboard. It’s bound to be from the Isabel. With any luck, we’ll find her.”

“Sir,” Mr. Soto said and issued orders to slow the ship.

“Helm,” the captain said. “Steady as she goes. Bring our port side abeam of the barrel.”

“Barrel abeam. Port side, yes, sir.”

“Diago,” Mr. Soto shouted. “Set our rigging to lift it aboard.”

“Sir.”

“Another barrel, sir,” the watch called. “Close to shore, sir, off our starboard quarter. Can’t be a couple miles.”

Captain Gill swung his glass and saw it for himself. Good he thought, now we’re getting somewhere.

The crew brought *Anna* to a stop and found a cannon tethered to the barrel.

“She was in trouble,” Mr Soto said to the Captain.

“She was that, Mr. Soto.”

“Shall we take it aboard, sir? And the other by the shore? Who knows how many more?”

“No,” the Captain said. “They’ll reduce our draft. When the tide goes out, I want as much water under her keel as we can get. We’ll find more, if I’m not mistaken. Put on minimum sail. Tell the men watching our depth to keep a sharp eye.”

Mr. Soto nodded his assent and went forward. It was all their lives if *Anna* ran aground.

A single sail bloomed ahead as *Anna* continued upstream. From now on, they would travel at minimum speed.

“More barrels, sir,” the watch shouted. “One, a couple miles starboard. Other to port. Three mile, I’d say.”

And so it went the rest of the day and the next. They found nine barrels, each with a cannon tied to it, but no sign of the *Isabel*.

“Wreckage, sir!” the watch shouted. “Here’s your heading.” He pointed at *Isabel*’s rotting hulk.

* * *

The old woman watched the big canoe. It was like the one rotting in the cove. Then she heard the watch shout and point at the cove’s entrance.

He's seen the wreckage, she said to herself. Knowing what the island would do to them. And to her. This brought a smile to her wrinkled face as she remembered sharing a sleeping mat with her husband. Smiling, she walked into the jungle and to the village.

* * *

"Helm, take us toward the cove entrance."

The Captain looked through his glass. "Diago," he shouted.

Diago came running. "Sir."

"Take the long boat and...."

"Wave! Wave!" the watch shouted. "Aft. Coming fast. Wave! Wave!"

"Damn," the captain muttered as he spun around. It was the Pororoca.² He hoped they would miss it. Looking abeam, he saw the river flowing *upstream*.

"Strike the sails. Diago, belay the longboat. That wave will take us into the cove."

Faster than we want to, the captain thought, but did not say.

"Watch," the captain shouted. "Do you see anything? Trees, branches. Anything that can hull us?"

The watch looked hard. Even used his glass. "Nothing, sir."

"Get down here."

"Sir," the watch shouted.

"Helm, rudder amidships," the captain said. "Mr. Soto, see everyone is holding on to something."

The wave came on fast. They had a few minutes at best.

Then *Anna* was riding the wave. The Pororoca lifted her as though she were a toy, taking her into the cove. Fast. Too fast.

Until....

There was a loud ripping noise as *Anna* came to rest on the sandy shore. Her bow lifted high. Her rudder torn off.

"Mt. Soto. See to our injured and have someone go below."

"Diago, get below with the carpenter," Mr. Soto shouted. "Ramirez, see to the injured."

"Right away, sir."

²The Pororoca is a tidal bore, with waves up to 4 m (13 ft) high, that travels up to 800 km (500 mi) upstream on the Amazon River and its tributaries.

* * *

The next day, the old woman watched from the shadows. They would send a party to walk the island, and they would find her. She smiled when she saw the boy. She walked off still smiling and took the trail to her village.

* * *

“Boy,” the captain shouted.

“Yes, sir,” he said as he came running.

“Give Mr. Soto my compliments and ask him to join me on the poop.”

“Yes, sir. Right way, sir.” And he was gone, bare feet slapping the deck.

“Sir, you wished to see me?” Mr. Soto said.

“Organize a party to see to the ship. I want to know our damage and the high-tide mark in this cove. If needed, give the carpenter the longboat. Have the cook see everyone is well fed tonight and the first meal of the day is to be substantial. Men and officers.”

“Yes, sir.” Mr. Soto said.

“Wait, the captain said, “you’ve more important things to do than see the cook. I’ll send the boy.

“Detail three men who’ve been here before to reconnoiter the island. See, they’re well armed. And send them to me before they leave.”

“Yes, sir. Question, sir?”

“Of course.”

“Why men who’ve been here before, sir?”

The captain nodded. “The jungle, Mr. Soto. Lots’ of ways for a man to die in there. I wouldn’t send anyone at all, but it’s critical that we know if there are Indians about.”

“Understood, sir.”

Soon, three men appeared on the poop. “Captain, Mr. Soto says we’re to see you before goin’ the jungle.”

“Yes, you’ve all been here before?”

They nodded.

“Good, you are to walk in single file, weapons ready, no smoking, and avoid open spaces. You may need to cut your way through. Do so if you must. And keep quiet. That may save your life. Keep off beaches. We don’t want Indians to know we’re here. Questions?”

There were none.

“Be back by sundown. You don’t want to get caught out there in the dark.”

They went forward to where a rope ladder was over the side. Climbing to the beach, they found the sand hot under their boots. Finding a trail, they knew they weren’t alone and followed it single file.

* * *

The carpenter completed his inspection and was reporting to the captain.

“*Anna’s* hull be fine,” he said. “But her rudder ain’t. Looks like she hit the bottom when the beach lifted the bow. We’re goin’ to need plank, sir. Thicker ‘n what’s aboard. We’ll need to cut down a stout tree, maybe two, and make ‘um, sir. And pray her iron work ain’t broke.”

Running a filthy hand through his hair, he looked at the captain. “It be bad, sir. We ain’t sea worthy without no rudder. Not in the river, neither. Got to dig the sand away afore we can begin to repair it. Don’t think the tide can lift her, sir. Not with the bow so high.”

“I understand.” Then to Mr. Soto. “Give the carpenter whatever he needs. Men, the longboat, help ashore to make his planks. Whatever he needs. When your men go ashore to find trees, take the boy. He can run messages if need be.”

“I will, sir. Thank ‘e, sir.” The carpenter said, but his face was not hopeful as he and Mr. Soto went forward.

* * *

The old woman returned to her village. She lived alone though the village would accommodate thirty people. She stoked the communal fire and walked to the river to get water and looked at her reflection. The lines on her face were lessening. She felt better. Stronger. Her knees no longer hurt. She thought of leaving the village, but the magic was strong here, and she needed it to be strong. This is the last time for me, she knew. Knowing that when the magic was slow, it meant that it would not work again.

* * *

As the sailors walked the trail, they were alert, weapons drawn, ready for anything. After what seemed like hours, they found the Indian village. It looked deserted. This worried them

because it seemed lived in, but there was no one around. They sought cover and watched. And waited. They exchanged glances. Something's wrong here.

Then, an old woman appeared. She walked to the water's edge, picked up a basket of food, and sat on a log. The quiet jungle told her she was being watched.

The men crawled away without making a sound. Found the trail and started back. After some minutes, they stopped and listened. Hearing no pursuit, they moved off. They would never lead a war party to the ship.

* * *

Bursting through the undergrowth, the three sailors saw *Anna*.

They found Mr. Soto. "Sir, found us a village. Empty 'cept for an old woman. Something wrong, sir. Village can hold thirty people. Maybe more. But it's empty, sir. 'Cept for the old woman."

Mr. Soto nodded. "You're going back out. There's still time before sunset." Then he went to find the captain.

Diago was having something to eat and talking to Ramone, his friend and ship's barber. Which meant he was also the ship's doctor.

"You haven't been complaining about that tattoo," Ramone said.

"Feels better," Diago lied, around a mouthful of horse beans. His arm throbbing.

Ramone squinted. "Almost gone, it is," he said. Nodding at the tattoo on a raging red arm. "I'll bleed it for you. Get your beard growing."

"How'd you know my beard ain't growd?"

Ramone shrugged. "Ain't nobody's c'mon, I'll see to your arm."

As Ramone emptied the bloody bowl, Diago was feeling worse. The cut Ramone made was excruciating. Mr. Soto sent him to lie down, knowing he couldn't go back into the jungle. Wondering why he was bled now.

Diago fell into a coma and died during the night. His corpse looked younger. The men saw that, and that their beards were getting shorter.

Back at the village, the men found that the old woman was gone seeing only a middle-aged woman who looked to be wearing the old one's clothes.

* * *

Four days later, a scavenging crew found uniforms and bones from *Isabel's* crew. The men panicked when they saw the bones were dressed in the uniform of sailors, but were the size of children. They ran for the *Anna*.

The boy saw them coming and heard their shouts while a good far piece away.

He ran to find Mr. Soto.

"Mr. Soto, sir," he said, out of breath. "It's the men what you sent to see around the *Isabel*, sir. Acting crazy, they are an runnin' back, sir."

Mr. Soto looked toward the *Isabel*. "Get below, son. Stay hid."

"Sir," his son said, running off. Soon the boy's bare feet could no longer be heard.

In minutes the men arrived.

Mr. Soto motioned for the captain to come forward.

"Captain," Ramone yelled, "we found the crew. Their bones anyway. And weapons, sir. But them bones be too small to be men inside them uniforms."

"What are you talking about?" the captain asked.

"The *Isabel's* crew, sir. Up the beach we were, near what's left of her. Meaning *Isabel*, sir. They be all shrunk up. Swords with 'um. No mistake, sir. No mistake. It's *Isabel's* crew. We got to go, sir. Now. Today. This island ain't natural."

"That's not possible, as you well know," the captain said, remaining calm. "The ship won't be ready for some time."

Mr. Soto watched this, but kept silent, allowing the captain to handle it. Which he did.

Then to Mr. Soto, the Captain said, "My cabin, in an hour." That he did not use Soto's name meant that this was serious.

* * *

An hour later, Mr. Soto knocked on the captain's door.

"Enter."

Without preamble, the captain said, "Things move apace. I did not realize the depth of the men's feelings. What we're doing is not working. We must be away from here... and soon. I have a solution. That's why you're here. Take a seat." He waved at a chair opposite his desk.

"I don't believe the island is haunted," the Captain said.

"I don't either, sir."

“Be that as it may, the men do. We must away in days, not months. Give me your honest opinion. The weight of ship’s castle keeps the stern fast against the bottom. The tide won’t float us because Anna’s bow is hard against the shore. All that you know.”

Mr. Soto nodded.

“We must lighten the ship. Predominantly the stern, but everything else as well. I propose we remove the sterncastle.”

At this Mr. Soto started, “sir?”

“I know,” the captain continued. “We’ll unbalance the ship. But if we don’t take drastic action, we’ll die here. There’s no other way to get her afloat. Do you have another suggestion?”

Mr. Soto saw the ship in his mind’s eye. Her bow on the beach. Her stern pressed against the bottom. “No, sir. I don’t.”

“I thought not.... We need the carpenter to support us. What we’re asking to do something no ship’s carpenter has ever been asked. His support is crucial.”

“Agreed, sir. Shall I fetch him?”

“No, I’ll send the boy.”

“Boy,” he shouted.

Miguel came running. “Sir?”

“Tell the carpenter to come to my quarters. Whatever he’s doing can wait.”

“Right away, sir.” And he ran to find the carpenter.

The captain saw Mr. Soto smile at the sight of him, but said nothing. The lad was a fine boy. One that any man would be proud to call his son.

There was a knock at the door. “Come in,” the captain said, loud enough to be heard.

The carpenter walked in to find the captain and first officer. I’m for it, he thought.

“You’re not in trouble,” the captain said. “Please sit down. May I offer you a sherry?”

“Sherry, sir?” he stammered.

“Please, sit yourself,” the captain said, motioning Mr. Soto to pour each of them a glass.

The carpenter was confused. He’d never been here before and knew being summoned to captain’s quarters was not a good thing. As he thought this, a glass filled with amber liquid was placed before him. He looked at it, then at the officers. The sipped it. He was not used to that, but was smart enough to do the same. It was delicious.

“It’s wonderful, sir. Thank you, sir. Now that I drunk your liquor and be sittin’ in your lovely chair. What can I do for you, sirs?”

The officers smiled. No fool this carpenter.

The captain sat back, took a breath. “We’ve got a solution to getting out of here,” he said. “And want your opinion.”

The carpenter nodded. Rubbed his chin.

Mr. Soto nodded at the captain.

“Proceed, Mr. Soto.”

“The captain and I know Anna is held fast. Her bow high on the beach and her stern hard on the bottom.”

“Yes, sirs. I knows that.”

The captain nodded, saying, “The problem is the stern is too heavy and putting everything ashore won’t help. It’s the ship itself that’s too heavy. So, what we suggest is removing her stern castle. All of it. Either that or we die here.”

It was the last comment that froze him. Officers never talked like this. They were always optimistic. “It could work. Yes, cept the ship be bad out of balance.”

They had him. He was solving problems, not saying they were crazy.

“We’ll move the cannon and cargo as far aft as we can. Once she’s afloat, if we need more weight, we’ll recover *Isabel’s* cannon. Then add stone. But... we’ll be free with a chance of getting home.”

The carpenter nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“How long will it take? Remember, we must keep two men on patrol and a couple other will be offloading her.”

The carpenter inhaled. Thinking. “Two week. Gonna’ bash everything overboard. No fine work... yeah, two week.”

“And another some days to balance her, when she’s afloat,” Mr. Soto said.

The carpenter nodded, looked out the window. “That’s about right,” he said. For the first time, having an opinion not in full accord with an officer. The captain and Mr. Soto let it passnt pass.

“Good, do you agree, Mr. Soto?” the captain asked.

“I do, sir.”

“Then it’s decided. We start tomorrow. One last thing,” he said to the carpenter. “Some may resent taking orders from you. If so, let Mr. Soto or myself know.”

“Right you are, sir.”

“You haven’t finished your sherry,” the captain said.

The next day, the crew began tearing off *Anna*'s stern castle and offloading everything that could be moved. They worked past sunset. Halting when there was just enough light to eat and find a place to sleep.

Every day the work got harder as the men got weaker. Mr. Soto was sorry he had no one to send Miguel to as he and the others began to fail. Every day was worse than the one before. Every night Miguel slept next to his father, loath to leave his side. Even though he was a boy he did his share of the work.

* * *

One day, Miguel awoke and tried to rouse his father to no avail.

The next day, she walked to the big canoe. Only the child remained alive. Hearing his cries she went to him. Took him by the hand.

At the village, she saw her husband coming to take her home. They walked to the river. She hadn't been this young in many years. And always wanted a child.

• THE END •

About the Author

Wayne A. English is an award-winning author of five published books and many articles, short stories, and poetry in local, national, and international publications. A noted instructor and speaker, Wayne lectures on writing, publishing, and marketing at the Connecticut Authors and Publishers Association, the Association of Publishers for Special Sales, and writing groups. Visit WayneAEnglish.com and follow him at [@wayneaeen](https://twitter.com/@wayneaeen) on X.