The Forgotten Island

by ReadWorks

When Lina awoke, she was alone on the island. The air was cool and bullfrogs croaked. It was that brief moment when the sun had set but the stars hadn't yet appeared. The whole sky was an indeterminate shade of deep blue, as though the moon were a nervous actress afraid to take her place on the stage. Lina rubbed her eyes and looked around.

"Hello?" she called. "Cesar? Marie?"

There was no response.

The moon was rising now, shedding light on the island. They had always called it "The Forgotten Island" because no one but them seemed to remember its existence. It wasn't on any of the maps they could find, and the park rangers didn't know about it. But its obscurity didn't bother the island. It just kept on existing. Lina secretly loved that the island was a secret between the three of them-her, Cesar, and Marie.

Lina remembered the day they had found the island. The Tennessee River was long and had several tributaries. In the hot summer days when there was no school, they would take Marie's father's boat down the river, exploring the side streams. It was two summers ago that they discovered The Forgotten Island.

But now Lina was alone, and it was night. Swimming in the river at night was dangerous. The river was treacherous, moving at a lazy pace most of the time but able to change into a roaring torrent within a few short minutes. Lina heard a far-off boom. Thunder. Of course.

She sighed. It was her own fault she was stuck in this situation.

"Come on, Lina, let Marie steer," Cesar had said. Marie was two years older than Lina, but much more timid and unsure on the water. Lina had given Marie the rudder, only to watch her move the boat around aimlessly in circles. In the end, Lina had snatched the rudder back to steer them to the island. Marie had sat to the side, silent and with tears slowly sliding down her cheeks. Marie always did know how to win sympathy.

They had argued then, and Cesar took Marie's side, the same way that Cesar always took Marie's side. Lina had exploded and yelled at them to just leave. So they left. Afterwards, she paced the island, looking into the horizon, watching for the boat to return. Eventually she grew tired of waiting

and lay down in the sand. The summer heat was oppressive, the air thick with moisture that stuck in your throat every time you took a breath. She had assumed Cesar and Marie would wake her up when they returned. She would apologize and everything would be fine. Except now it was nighttime, with a storm approaching, and she was all alone on the island.

"Lina. Get a grip."

Just saying the words out loud made her feel better, stronger. Lina saw the first flash of lightning. She counted the seconds-one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten-before she heard the boom of thunder. The thunder was louder now as the storm neared. She pulled her jacket around her chest tighter. If it were storming, no one would be able to bring a boat to find her on the island. If Cesar and Marie were stuck on the river during the storm, they might be in even more danger than she was.

The Tennessee River could be fickle in the summer, and this was just the type of storm that could bring about a surge of rapids. Lina felt the first cold raindrop slide down her neck, and her mind returned to her own predicament. At least Marie and Cesar had each other. She was stuck on this narrow slice of land by herself. She just hoped she didn't become as forgotten as the island.

"Stay calm, stay calm, Lina," she said, but this time she said it silently, in her head. Thunder boomed loudly in the distance. What were her options? She could try to swim to shore, but she had never been the strongest swimmer, and the river's current was already quickening as the rain began to fall harder. She could wait out the storm in the hopes that by morning someone would come to retrieve her. She made her way to the beach on the east side.

She slid down to the beach, quietly. Lina knew this island, and she knew how to move without startling the birds that nested in the grass. She reached the beach and lay down. Now there was no sound but the bullfrogs and the steady patter of raindrops.

Suddenly, Lina spotted something in the water. It was Marie's father's boat, and inside it were Marie, Cesar, and Marie's dad himself. As the boat approached, it became clear that Marie's dad was the one steering through the turbulent river. Lina breathed a deep sigh, expelling her anxiety, and went running toward the water, waving her hands frantically. She saw the expressions on the faces in the boat turn, simultaneously, to relief.

It was proving difficult for Marie's dad to reach the edge of the beach; the wind kept turning the boat away from the sand, pulling the boat's nose back. In her gratitude and eagerness to get off the island, Lina jumped into the river. Only once she was submerged in the icy water did she stop to think: If Marie's dad couldn't battle the current in his boat, how would she be able to? But before she could panic or take so much as a single stroke, she had already drifted up to the side of the small vessel. A cluster of arms reached into the water for her own, and hauled her up and out. She smiled weakly at Marie's dad and, without a word, clutched Cesar and Marie in a cold group hug. They didn't seem to mind becoming wet.

The summer continued, and Lina and Cesar taught Marie how to steer the boat. But they never returned to the island. There were other side streams to explore.