

ILHA de QUEIMADA GRANDE; A.K.A. The ISLAND of the GOLDEN SNAKES

By: Caitlin Quinn
Part 3



"Papa! Papa! Where are you?" she screamed, afraid he couldn't hear her over the screeching wind, the sonic booms of thunder, and the creaking of breaking wood. The mast was splintered in two, half-way up. Where the white sail should have been, only tatters of it remained. Ominous gray sky filled the open space. Huge areas of the rail were missing, and the deck was badly damaged, with gaping holes and broken planks jutting up at odd angles. Mangled debris bumped against the starboard rail. Janaina realized the Iara was listing and if her father couldn't right the vessel, she would soon be on her side. And Janaina would have to abandon ship.

Where was her father?

She tried to free herself, but she'd tied the knot so securely she couldn't get it to budge. It didn't help that the rope was soaked, making it even harder to loosen. She was fighting panic when she heard his voice.

"Janaina, are you hurt? ARE YOU HURT?" he yelled. She saw her father, still at the helm, tying it off, his nimble fingers having done it so many times before. Good thing, since he was looking at her – not at the wheel.

"No, I'm okay. Are you okay?" she asked.

He zigzagged through the maze of gaping holes, jutting planks and debris to reach her.

"I'm stuck, Papa, I can't budge the rope," she told him.

He worked to free her, then asked her again if she was okay. "Your ear is bleeding and you have a gash over your eye. Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"My ribs hurt, but I'm okay, as long as I don't breathe too deeply."

Concern showed on his face, but his voice was cheerful. "Then, as the doctor would say, 'don't do that!'" He tousled her hair and helped her up. "Do you think you could bail water while I get to the radio and send distress signals?"

She nodded. Bailing water was going to hurt her ribs, but, she knew she had to do it. She smiled at her father and he disappeared below as she scooped and tossed, scooped and tossed. She could hear him below, the radio squawking as he switched channels.

"Mayday, mayday, mayday, this is Iara - mãe d'água, Iara - mãe d'água, Iara - mãe d'água, mayday, Iara - mãe d'água!, mayday!" her father called into the radio, waiting for an answer, switching channels and repeating the mayday call when no one answered. "Janaina," he called up to her, "come down here, I need you to keep trying while I assess the damage."

Janaina tossed the bucket aside, futilely wiping her wet hands on her soaked jeans. She joined her father at the radio. He had taught her how to use the radio last year and had made her show him she still knew the proper procedure before they'd left the harbor yesterday. "I've got it, Papa."

He smoothed her hair out of her eyes, pushing it behind her ear and kissed her cheek. "Princesa, we'll be fine. Just keep trying to raise someone; I have to get back on deck. When they respond, give them these coordinates." He pointed to the chart he had spread on the table, a

dark red circle around where he believed they were. "The GPS is still functioning from what I can tell, but be sure they know the navigation system took a direct hit when she rolled. Keep trying, Princesa."

"Mayday, mayday, mayday, this is Iara - mãe d'água, Iara - mãe d'água, Iara - mãe d'água, mayday, Iara - mãe d'água!, mayday! My boat is sinking! I require immediate assistance. Two people on board. Iara - mãe d'água. Over?" Janaina repeated her father's words into the radio. She waited for two minutes, repeated and waited another two minutes before switching to another channel and began the process all over again. She continued to switch through the three main monitored designated channels - marine MF on 2182 kHz; marine VHF radio channel 16 (156.8 MHz); and airband frequencies of 121.5 MHz and 243.0 MHz.

"Princesa, have you reached anyone?" her father asked. He was leaning over the hatchway, looking worried.

"No, Papa, no, not yet. Still trying."

"We're taking on too much water; we'll have to take the lifeboat. Keep trying while I load supplies. As soon as I'm finished, I'll come get you and the radio. Is there anything you can't live without?" he asked.

"No, Papa, only you. Oh, my favorite purple sweater – can I take it?" Funny, she thought, why was that purple sweater the only thing she didn't want to lose? A present from her father just before he moved away, she realized. She turned back to her task with the radio while her father gathered food, bottled water and spare clothes. He grabbed a pre-packed plastic tub out of the lazarette which already contained flashlights, batteries, a transistor radio, camping utensils and pots, blankets, and a flare gun. He tossed their spare clothes on top of the contents and closed the lid, locking it in place. He then pulled an empty bin from the closet and put the water and food inside, throwing in matches and water treatment tablets.

Janaina jumped when the voice came over the radio.

"This is the *Encantado*, we are relaying the call to the Brazilian authorities. We have your position as 24°29'00"S 46°41'00"W 24.483333°S 46.683333°W - off the coast of Ilha de Queimada Grande. Correct?"

"Yes, yes!" she screamed, forgetting protocol. Taking a calming breath, Janaina responded, "Sorry, this is the Iara - mãe d'água, two people on board, taking a life raft to nearest island."

"NO!" the radioman responded. "Ilha de Queimada Grande is viper infested, no humans allowed. Remain onboard if possible. Keep off island!"

Paolo took the radio, "sinking fast, no time, boarding the life raft now. Send help!" He signaled for her to grab the radio and follow him. The boat was ahull, broadside to the sea, making it nearly impossible to climb the sideways ladder to get topside. On what was left of the deck, she could see her father had the life raft loaded, secured to the side of the boat, ready to drop into the water. He helped her climb over the railing, onto the curved hull. Holding her hand to steady her, he helped her in and lowered the raft,

reminding her to stay in the center for stability. Once it was in the water, he jumped overboard and swam over to her. She scooted to the back of the raft, creating a counterbalance so he could haul himself on.

They were now adrift; their only salvation a snake infested island.

"What shall we do, Papa?" Janaina asked. She had already gnawed one fingernail to the quick and was in the process of decimating another.

"We're safe in the raft for now, the authorities know our position – we wait," he said.

Janaina would have felt much better if his eyebrow hadn't been twitching. Or, if the sea was a little less choppy, the temperature a bit warmer, and the sun not setting. It also didn't help that the tide was forcing them away from their sailboat – and closer to the rocky shoreline of the forbidden island. As it was, her fingernail was a minor casualty in the grand scheme of their situation. She wished she could climb into her father's arms for comfort, but she wasn't a little girl anymore. It would also throw off the life raft's delicate balance. It was crucial they keep the float level. So, she sat at one end, staring across the length of the raft at her father, their supplies between them.

"Papa, it's getting cold, can I get my sweater?"

"I'll get it, sit tight. Would you rather have a blanket?" he asked, securing the oars he'd been using to keep the raft away from the island. Once he'd snapped them into the hooks, he leaned forwards a bit, inching along. "I'll push it towards you, slow movements when you reach for it. Be sure to watch the float's balance when you wrap it around yourself, understand? And try not to let it fall into the puddle forming near your feet. Night's chill is coming and if that blanket gets wet, it won't be of any use to you."

She nodded again, watching how he moved, slid actually, towards the plastic bin. He kept his center of gravity low, even when he opened the lid and pulled out the blanket. He laid it on his lap, careful not to shift his weight, retrieved two bottles of water and secured the lid. Placing the blanket and one of the waters on the lid, he pushed them as close to her as he could without upsetting the raft.

Once he was resealed, she inched to the bin the way she'd just seen her father do. The raft rocked, but she didn't upend it. She held the blanket and water in one hand, using the other to help her regain her perch. Putting the bottle of water between her feet, she covered herself with the blanket. She had to be careful to keep the blanket from getting wet in the small puddles along the raft's floor.

"Papa, the moon, it's waning, what will we do for light when the sun sets?" She knew she was starting to sound whiny, but being out on the ocean in this tiny vessel wasn't in her plans. Her mother would lose it if she found out.

"We have the flashlight, we'll use it at intervals to be sure we stay close to the Iara - mãe d'água. If we drift too far, the authorities will have a harder time finding us. We also need to be sure we aren't getting too close to Snake Island."

She looked out and realized that despite her father's efforts, the raft was riding the tide. They were far too close to the rocky shore. "Papa, is it really true you're only one step away from certain death?"

Look for Part 4 next week!
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