

Title: The Secrets of the Merfolk

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Majestically, the sun inched above the eastern horizon. Vermillion and gold illuminated the clear heavens. Under a dazzling sky, my ship floated above the crystal sea.

I got up and looked around. No sign of land. A heavy sigh escaped my lips as the familiar rumbling sounds started from my stomach. A couple days had passed since the frightening storm that caused me to separate from my fellow shipmates.

Although we were close (we worked together for over five years), I always found it hard to communicate with them. It was always my goal to make as many friends as I could. However, it is easier said than done. They say that pirates are jolly and that their sense of comradery was out of this world. But maybe I was the one who was out of this world.

Gazing down at the horizon, a tiny splash of emerald glinted, as if calling out to me. Squinting at the sight, I sprang up with ecstasy.

“Land!” I exclaimed, excitement creeping up my spine. “I can finally find someone who can help me.”

I scurried towards the sails and opened them. I wasn't a navigator, but I know the basic skills. A cool breeze blew all around me as I headed for my new destination.

It wasn't long before I managed to reach the earth. Nearing the island, I began admiring the picturesque view. A small smile tugged at the corner of my lips at my serendipitous discovery. A euphoric sensation filled me up, giving me a sudden rush of confidence. I tore my gaze away from the scenery and focused on my trembling hand.

The smile on my lips never left, even when I landed on the slippery, soft sand. Oh, how I missed this feeling. The velvety sensation of sand expanded my grin. The

beach was treacherously empty. I had to hurry on to look for help before it became dark again. Who knows what lurks around in the grand forest?

Taking small strides, I ambled towards the thick trees. Taking glimpses here and there, it was obvious no one was around. The island was remotely small, so it wouldn't be a surprise if no one was here.

Time and time again I shouted for someone, but there was no reply. I sighed in defeat and decided to look inside the jungle. I am a pirate after all!

I wandered around deeper into the forest, hoping for some salvation and some food.

After a while of straining my legs, it was time for a rest. My eyes trailed around the area, searching for a place—

I gasped.

It was divine.

The spectacular scenery burned into my mind.

The forest was colossal, impenetrable, and diverse. A cacophony of inhuman sounds, belonging mostly to the insects and birds, echoed in the air, and were strangely synchronised with the sound of the wind howling in the atmosphere.

An eerie, lonely train carriage was left on its side in the middle of the forest. A colony of fungi and nettles grew around it, hiding it from view. Trees, grand and mighty, engulfed the train, as if they were protecting it from a predator. It was as if it was a competition of which branch could cover the most. Magnificent shamrock-green moss dominated the northern side of the trees and the edges of the train, leaving a thick trail of damp. The crisp air, carrying the earthy and moist scents of the forest, brushed past the many leaves, causing them to dance silently, as if waving a welcome at me.

My eyes lingered on the train carriage. What was a train doing here? In the middle of an island...in the middle of open seas...?

Rhythmic and mellow, the water trickled down the streams, emitting a rather melodic and melancholy sound, as if distracting me from my bizarre discovery. The water was begging to be listened to, to be heard. A sweetly demonic sonata was what it was; a one of a kind.

I sat on a rock and admired the view some more. The question swayed in my mind. Who put this train here? Why was it here? This forest was an explosion of gorgeous chaos, a disastrous masterpiece with a blackhole of a mystery sitting at its heart. My hands groped at the precious soil beneath my feet. It felt jovial and full of life, just like the rest of the forest...It was as if the forest was trying to keep a hidden secret.

I swallowed lightly as my mind raced, trying to think up of a solution. Then, and only then, did I remember how awfully thirsty and hungry I was. Hesitantly, I leaned down to the ground and cupped some of the water in my palms and drank.

The water was as sweet as honey and colder than ice. I kept gasping for more as the liquid cascaded down my throat and into my empty stomach.

My eyes landed on a juicy and appetising fruit on the other side. I picked it off from the tree and gobbled it up greedily, finishing my small meal with a satisfied slurp.

The stream led me back to the open sea.

“Seems like there’s a tide,” I mumbled, mentally reminding myself to tie my boat so it doesn't float away.

And I did just that. My hands fumbled with the coarse rope, trying to tie it properly when a flash of rusted, bronze metal glinted in the corner of my eye. Curious, I let go of the ropes and pulled up my trousers to my knees as I splashed through the waters, trying to get closer to whatever I saw.

My face paled.

It was a train track...

Leading down to the dark open waters.

Something clicked in my brain. So that's where the train came from.

But where...where does this train track lead to...?