

Friendship in a Bottle

Ari was a lonely lad who lived on a large island called Iceland. His village was a fishing hamlet along the green, rugged coastline, and Ari often wondered what lay beyond the horizon. The days were long and cold, and he spent many hours of silence in his tiny cottage thinking about what life would be like in a warm, sunny place.

“I shall find a true friend far away from here,” Ari mused, and he began writing a letter. He described himself as a loner who had few visitors, yet he had a warm heart. It was his hope to find true friendship with someone who understood his sadness.

Ari described the volcanos on his snowy island and the magnificent glaciers. He wrote about the sky turning green, blue, yellow, and pink at night when the Northern Lights swirled in the heavens like silk. For days, Ari poured his soul and innermost thoughts into the letter. Then he rolled the parchment, placed it into a bottle, and sealed it tightly.

At high tide, Ari flung the bottle out into the sea and wished upon the brightest star that a true friend would find the letter.

A year later, many cold nights after tossing his message into the sea, Ari received a letter in the mail. He had no idea who would be writing him, but with glee, he ripped open the envelope.

Dear Ari,

I found your simple but lovely letter. Imagine my surprise when your little bottle from so far away washed up on my shore. I, too, live on an island. It is called Sardinia. My island is warm and filled with mountains, crystal white beaches, and emerald waters. Most of the people I know are my family, and I, too, long for a true friend. Now that you have found a friend far away, I do hope that you will write and tell me more about your life and people.

Your new friend,

Renata

For three years, Ari and Renata exchanged letters. They wrote about their customs, traditions, and holidays and described their favorite foods. The two shared secrets about their villages and wrote about their festivals and music. Their words were poetry to Ari, and Renata’s letters breathed fresh air into his lonely existence. Ari knew that he had found more than a best friend—he had found his one true love.

Without notifying Renata, Ari embarked on a long journey by ship from Iceland to the Mediterranean—to Sardinia—to meet his true love in person. When Ari found Renata, her warm hazel eyes twinkled as his heart fluttered like a swan in flight. Renata instantly recognized Ari, and his sapphire blue eyes melted her

heart.

The two were married at a wedding filled with dancing, music, and food. They wrote their vows on parchment paper and placed them in the small bottle Renata had kept for all these years.

It was fate that caused them to meet with a simple message of friendship in a bottle. Their story spread far and wide. And now, it is a common sight to see young maidens searching the beaches for secret messages sealed in bottles, hoping to find their one true love.

Questions

1. Why does Ari write a letter to someone he had never met?
2. Why do you think the author includes so many details about Iceland?
3. What are some of the differences between Iceland and Sardinia?
4. How does the author show the unconditional love Ari and Renata have for each other?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. horizon
2. loner
3. innermost
4. existence
5. embarked

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "Ari often wondered what lay beyond the **horizon**"

a. line where the sky meets the Earth b. dormant volcano c. local area or zone d. wood fence

2) "He described himself as a **loner** who had few visitors"

a. crazy clown b. banker c. person who avoids others; recluse d. small farmer

3) "Ari poured his soul and **innermost** thoughts into the letter"

a. complete; total b. flowery or poetic c. most recent; new d. most private; deepest

4) "Renata's letters breathed fresh air into his lonely **existence**"

a. empty bottle b. life or manner of living c. fog or cloud d. house or abode

5) "Ari **embarked** on a long journey by ship from Iceland to the Mediterranean"

a. planned; scheduled b. stopped; halted c. started or began d. snapped; cracked