

JOURNEY TO THE WESTERN SEA

"Toadal Miscommunication"

Written by

Elliott Maya

September 2nd, 2021
elliodor@gmail.com

ACT I

INT. GOLDEN RIVER - RIVER BED - DAY

We float down through a deep, exotic river, which is gorgeous and clean... until we reach the seabed. Broken fishing nets, rotten wood planks, and the scattered debris of a thousand spring breaks clogs the river vegetation.

A current pushes a soda can from the debris into a BROWN, OILY PILE. Beat. TWO EYES appear in the pile. An oozing mouth chock-full of crooked scrap-metal teeth devours the can. Can-metal armor oozes to the OILY PILE'S surface as it reforms into a SLUDGE MONSTER, a creature born from muck and garbage.

The sludge monster SNEERS at some SCARED FISH-FOLK nearby.

SLUDGE MONSTER
Cower in fear, guppies! Mwahaha!

ATZI (O.S.)
HEEEYAH!

A PINK BLUR kicks the monster into the river bank.

SLUDGE MONSTER
Ow.

The sludge monster dissolves into black bubbles. As the bubbles clear, we see ATZI (14), a pink, one-armed axolotl warrior girl posing triumphantly with a large bag made of algae on her back. She flexes her bicep and kisses it.

ATZI
All stink monsters will one day
fear the name of AZTI THE
GREATEREST! Right, Mossimo?

MOSSIMO (O.S.)
MmmMHFFHHHHmmmmmm!

ATZI
Ohhh, I forgot.

She upends the bag. Out falls MOSSIMO (13), a small, shy, humanoid moss-ball -- right into a trash pile. He gets up and gingerly removes a blunt fish hook from his arm.

MOSSIMO
That's the second sticky monster
thing we've seen together. What are
those things?

ATZI

Who cares? I shall CRUSH them all!

Mossimo stands and examines a map drawn on a small lily-pad.

MOSSIMO

According to Madame Mariposa's map, the Great Current is between us and the top of the Golden River. If we can get past the Current, we'll be one step closer to finding out why everyone in our villages got sick! ... But where is it?

ATZI (O.S.)

Over here!

He spots Atzi on a high rock pile, gazing at something. He climbs up to join her -- and GASPS.

Directly in front of them, golden streaks of light flurry and glitter in the water, whipping their hair back. This is...

MOSSIMO

The Great Current. It's *beautiful*.

ATZI

Stop gazing around like some bug-eyed tilapia. Let's surf this wave!

A piece of trash from his hair is sucked into the Great Current. It's torn apart and whisked away in seconds. Mossimo gulps and draws a new map in the mud with a stick.

MOSSIMO

Beautiful... but dangerous!! Let's find a safer way. If we follow this route here, we'll make it over the Current in three days.

ATZI

THREE DAYS?! Good thing I tied that rope around your ankle.

MOSSIMO

I suppose with potty breaks, it could be more like 5 -- wait, what?

He looks down. A river-frond rope ties his and Atzi's ankles together. He follows the rope to the stone in Atzi's hand.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)

But I'm not a strong swimmer!

ATZI

But I am!

She HURLS the stone into the Current. They're yanked into it.

INT. GREAT CURRENT - CONTINUOUS

Atzi CHEERS like it's a roller coaster.

Mossimo SMACKS into a piece of flotsam and hangs onto it. Atzi runs into him from behind. The water throws him around. Atzi holds their rope and rides flotsam like a jet-ski. Mossimo steers them out of the current into open water.

ATZI

The ride's over already? Booooring.

A shadow slowly looms behind them. They don't notice.

MOSSIMO

You know what's worse than being boring? Being lost.

Mossimo and Atzi notice the shadow. They both turn -- And find themselves inches away from a HUGE ARAIPAIMA FISH.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)

Thank goldfish, we're saved! Hi, we're trying to pass the Great Current, but my associate *didn't follow my plan*. Now we're lost.

ATZI

I prefer "directionally free."

MOSSIMO

(to arapaima)

Can you point us the right way?

The arapaima points at herself, then opens her mouth and SUCKS THEM TOWARD HER MOUTH LIKE A VACCUUM. Atzi BEAMS.

ATZI

Finally, a worthy challenge!

She grabs Mossimo and charges in with a <BATTLE CRY>. The arapaima swallows them and swims away. <THUMP.> The arapaima rocks unsteadily and winces.

ARAPAIMA

Oof. That one had some kick.

EXT. BACKWATER BAYOU - SURFACE - DAY

A bayou, thick with vegetation. The water bubbles by the shore. The bruised and exhausted arapaima flops on the shore and spits out a goop-covered Mossimo and a goopless Atzi.

ARAPAIMA

Blech. Too. Much. Kick.

The arapaima swims off. Atzi does martial arts moves.

ATZI

ANOTHER FLAWLESS VICTORY!

Mossimo stares at his goop covered body and twitches.

MOSSIMO

That... changed me.

Atzi licks the goop on his cheek.

ATZI

Mmmm, a little fishy, but not bad.

MOSSIMO

Yes, bad! We're way off track!
(hyperventilating)
My village is counting on me to
find the cure to the Black
Sickness! If I don't...

ATZI

Relax, Bossimo. Where are we?

MOSSIMO

I would know if *someone* hadn't
gotten us eaten by a --

ATZI

Shh!

Atzi covers Mossimo's mouth with a goopy hand. Mossimo gags.

ATZI (CONT'D)

My warrior senses are tingling.

She parts the thick vegetation, revealing --

A small BARGE made of river plants grounded on the bayou shore. Boxes of TOADSTOOL SHIPMENTS cover the deck. An old fishing line acts as an anchor.

And standing next to that anchor is PALAKA (60s), a squat frog holding a bouquet. He fusses with a blonde toupee.

Palaka's back is to them. He reads notes to his reflection.

FROG

"Dear LaPrawnda." No, too formal.
(a la Fonzi)

"What's cookin, good lookin?"
(normal)

You want to take LaPrawnda on a fancy riverboat date, Palaka, not to a bayou barbecue! I'm hopeless.

ATZI (O.S.)

I'll say.

Palaka YELPS and spins around, sending his toupee, bouquet, and too-tight cravat flying into the water. All but one of his coat buttons pops off. His belly sags through his shirt.

PALAKA

Nooo, my date night outfit! My date night bouquet! My date night toupee! I mean... my real hair... that I... never... had?

Mossimo and Atzi splash onto the deck. Palaka leaps back from the water and checks to make sure no water landed on him.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

More bayou brats come to laugh at sad, lonely Palaka, huh?

Atzi nods. Mossimo grabs her face and shakes her head no.

MOSSIMO

I'm Mossimo. This is Atzi.

ATZI

Atzi the *greaterest*.

She grabs a toadstool and chomps it decisively.

MOSSIMO

We need to get over the Great Current. Can you take us?

Palaka angrily points at his things floating in the water.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)

Oops. We can get them back for you!

A crocodile devours Palaka's stuff, belches, then disappears.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)

Oh.

PALAKA
Tonight I tell LaPrawnda--

THREE GNATS fly down and buzz around him like a Greek chorus.

GNATS
(singing)
LAPRAWNDAAAAA!

PALAKA
How my heart yearns for hers! But I
can't tell her without my date
night outfit.

Suddenly, his last shirt button bursts off, ricochets the gnats away, then knocks him over. He lays there, sniffing.

Mossimo pulls Atzi aside for a chat.

MOSSIMO
Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

ATZI
Yes. Let's take his boat while he's
weak.

MOSSIMO
No!!
(to Palaka)
Mr. Palaka, what if we got you some
new stuff to impress your date?

PALAKA
You would do that? For me?

ATZI
And a ride over the Great Current.

She takes another bite of toadstool. Stink lines come off it. Mossimo pinches his nose and waves the stink lines away.

MOSSIMO
Just the smell makes my head ache.

Palaka takes the toadstool from Atzi.

PALAKA
Help me land the prawn of my
dreams, and you've got a deal.

He holds his tongue out for a handshake. Mossimo pushes Atzi forward. She gives Palaka a masculine predator handshake.

ACT II**EXT. BACKWATER BAYOU - DAY - LATER**

Mossimo paces before Atzi and Palaka.

MOSSIMO

If we follow my three-step prawn --
plan, you'll impress LaPrawnda.

The THREE GNATS buzz around him.

GNATS

LAPRAWNDAAAAAAAAA!

MOSSIMO

Do they do that every time?

PALAKA

Yes.

<MSFX: UPBEAT LOUISIANA FROGGY MUSIC> launches a montage:

EXT. BACKWATER BAYOU - DAY - LATER (MONTAGE)

Mossimo finishes a beautiful new toupee made out of reeds.

MOSSIMO (V.O.)

Step one: make a new toupee.

He turns to show Atzi, and sees her plop stinky algae on Palaka's head.

ATZI

Whaddya think?!

PALAKA

Bold choice. LaPrawnda loves bold.

The gnats pop out of his toupee.

GNATS

LAPRAWNDAAAAAAAAA!

Mossimo grumpily checks "toupee" on a checklist.

EXT. BACKWATER BAYOU - DAY - LATER

Mossimo carefully arranges beautiful wildflowers in a vase then carries them toward Palaka, who sits on a nearby rock.

MOSSIMO (V.O.)

Step two: find a new bouquet.

Atzi charges past him, dumping his vase to the ground. It shatters. She dumps some flowering weeds in Palaka's arms.

ATZI

These ones stink good to me.

PALAKA

They're pink. LaPra--

The gnats swoop in to sing but Mossimo covers Palaka's mouth. The gnat leader gives him "I'm watching you" eyes as he flies out backward. Mossimo uncovers Palaka's mouth.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

She loves pink.

Mossimo parts the browning bouquet's leaves. A caterpillar waves back. Mossimo recoils.

MOSSIMO

They're rotten and full of bugs!

PALAKA

Keep 'em. LaPrawnda loves...
intrigue.

The gnats zoom back in and pose dramatically on the bouquet.

GNATS/CATERPILLAR

LAPRAWNDAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

Mossimo screams into his hands, then checks off "bouquet."

INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS - EARLY EVENING

Palaka sits on the pedal-engine stool beside the captain's helm and looks at camera uncomfortably.

MOSSIMO (O.S.)

Finally, step three: find the
perfect date night outfit.

REVERSE POV: Mossimo, dressed in a smart grass blazer, beret, and glasses, poses elegantly on a make-shift runway. The gnats <HUM CLUB MUSIC BEATS> and vogue on the back of the runway.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)

This seasonal look embodies the
modern seafaring gentleman.

Atzi stomps down the runway as she models Aztec warrior attire made from reeds and found objects.

ATZI

Too fancy. Impress her by striking fear in her heart! Wear mine!

PALAKA

Maybe that crocodile threw up my old clothes... Let's go check?

Atzi and Mossimo approach Palaka with fire in their eyes.

The gnats <HUM THE "JAWS" THEME>.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

Uhm... kids?

INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

On Mossimo and Atzi as they fuss with something off-screen.

PALAKA (O.S.)

Geez, I look...

They step aside, revealing a mirror behind them. Palaka wears an ugly combo of both outfits: the dripping beret, the warrior chest plate, and slacks under the warrior skirt.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

Like hot phooey! I can't wear this!

MOSSIMO

But it's time for your date!

A gnat whispers to Atzi, then flies off. She nudges Palaka.

ATZI

Umm, there's someone here for you?
LaPrawn-something?

The gnats start singing. Their leader covers their mouths and shakes his head. One gnat sobs. They fly out, disappointed.

Palaka stares blankly at the kids. Completely bugged out.

MOSSIMO

Hello? Mr. Palaka? Are you okay?

Palaka snaps to with a crazed smile. He grabs the helm.

PALAKA

I will be-- once I'm OUT OF HERE!

Palaka grabs the helm, pedals his feet, and GUNS IT. The force knocks Mossimo and Atzi against the back wall.

MOSSIMO
(dripping with sarcasm)
WOOOOOW, good job, Atzi!

ATZI
(brightly)
Thank you!! And I like what you're
doing with your voice! I wanna try!
(sarcastic-like)
Talking like this is soooo fun...

EXT. PALAKA'S SHIP - EVENING - MOMENTS LATER

The boat speeds recklessly through the bayou, plowing through roots, disrupting waterfowl, and spooking dragonflies.

INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

Palaka, panting and exhausted, paddles/steers like a madman.

Behind him, the boat's speed holds Mossimo and Atzi against opposite ends of the back wall. They struggle to hold on.

PALAKA
If I never stop sailing, the date
can never happen, and if the date
never happens, LaPrawnda will never
discover the truth! <CRAZY LAUGH>

MOSSIMO
What truth?

Mossimo spots the emergency brake lever behind Palaka and begins pulling himself across the adjoining wall toward it. On the other end of the cabin, Atzi crawls along the other wall toward the steering helm. They both call to Palaka.

MOSSIMO (CONT'D)
Mr. Palaka, what's going on?!

The ship JUMPS. Palaka's algae toupee flies off and smacks Atzi. Atzi shakes off the toupee. It gets in Mossimo's mouth.

PALAKA
I just can't face her!

Mossimo spits the algae toupee out.

MOSSIMO

Whatever it is, we can help you!

PALAKA

You can't! I'm in too deep!

ATZI

How can you be too deep if we're
above water?!

PALAKA

Too deep in my LIES!

WHUMP! Palaka swerves wildly, tossing Atzi and a pile of
stuff against Mossimo. Mossimo catches an old paint bucket.

MOSSIMO

A green paint bucket...?

PALAKA

The truth... The TRUTH...

Palaka collapses on the steering helm, swerving the ship one
last time. Mossimo and Atzi land on the emergency brake. The
boat <SCREECHES> to a halt. Palaka falls face-down.

Mossimo and Atzi rush over and roll him over -- and GASP.

Sweat streaks run down Palaka's bumpy green face... and
reveal the brown underneath.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

You've seen me now. The truth is,
I'm no frog. I'm... a toad.

INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

Mossimo shows Palaka and Atzi the paint can.

MOSSIMO

Is this the real reason you ran?
Because you didn't want anyone to
know you're really a toad?

PALAKA

Not just anyone. LaPrawnda.

ATZI

La-Who now?

In b.g., the gnats SMACK the window and slide down the glass.

GNAT #1

La...Prawn... forget it.

The gnats pack it up and fly away for good.

Palaka grabs a scrapbook off the floor and flips it open to a picture of YOUNG LAPRAWNDA holding toadstool-kebabs and side-eyeing a toad. YOUNG PALAKA hides in bushes nearby.

A cricket hops up and plays its legs like a <VIOLIN> as Palaka talks.

PALAKA

Years ago, I heard my sweet
LaPrawnda say the one thing she
can't stand in this big, beautiful
bayou is a toad. I knew then that
the only way she'd want me was if I
was a frog. I've been paintin'
myself green ever since.

MOSSIMO

Who took this picture?

PALAKA

LaPrawnda's aunt, LaPrawndAuntie.

MOSSIMO

Let LaPrawnda meet the real you.

PALAKA

But what if she doesn't like the
real me?

Atzi picks up Palaka and shakes him like a tumbler. The rest of the paint flies off. She sets him on his feet.

ATZI

Then you will win back your dignity-

She cobbles Palaka's lamp into a spear.

ATZI (CONT'D)

IN ARMED COMBAT.

Beat. Palaka pulls on his work clothes.

PALAKA

You are some strange children.

ACT III**INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - DECK - EVENING - LATER**

Palaka (dressed in his normal clothes) stands behind the wheelhouse. He peaks around at the ship. Fireflies glued to the railings with sap give the ship a warm, country charm. Atzi glues the last firefly and gives Palaka a thumbs up. She points her thumb off-screen. Palaka looks over to--

A toadstool-table surrounded by a riverweed divider. Seated at it is LAPRAWNDA (60s), a sweet, 100% country Mantis shrimp. She has tiny claws on her left side, one GIANT CLAW on her right. In SLO-MO, she tosses her hair-like antennae.

Palaka sighs dreamily, then ducks behind the wheelhouse and takes a tub of green paint from his jacket. Mossimo takes it.

MOSSIMO

Just be yourself. Ready?

Palaka's tongue plasters his hair into a combover. Nods.

PALAKA

Let's ship out.

LAPRAWNDA (O.S.)

Palaka? Are we goin' bug-fishin'?

Mossimo pats his back. Palaka gulps and sidles closer.

PALAKA

Actually, LaPrawnda, I brought you here today because I wanted to tell you something. Close your eyes.

She does. Palaka squishes into the seat across from her.

PALAKA (CONT'D)

Alright, you can open 'em.

She opens her eyes and JUMPS.

LAPRAWNDA

You got chameleon disease?!

In b.g., Atzi grabs the lamp-spear. Mossimo pulls her away.

PALAKA

What? No! I'm telling you I'm not the frog you think I am.... Because I'm a toad. You must hate me now.

LaPrawnda takes his hand with her giant claw. <BONE SNAP>. He bites his lip to hide the pain.

LAPRAWNDA

I'm confused. I don't hate toads, I hate toadstools! If I ate one, I'd have the rumbliest tummy this side of the crustacean-dixon line!

Mossimo sticks his head through the riverweed divider.

MOSSIMO

I told you, Atzi!

Atzi sticks her head through the divider too, shrugs, and eats another toadstool. Her stomach <GURGLES HEAVILY>.

ATZI

Maybe they're a little zingy.

LaPrawnda pointedly CLEARS HER THROAT and looks at Palaka.

LAPRAWNDA

Palaka, I'd eat a million toadstools if it meant I could lay eyes on just one of your lovely warts. I'm mighty fond of you.

She squeezes his hand with her big claw again. <BONE SNAP>.

PALAKA

(choking back tears)
I'm mighty fond of you too.

The kids cover their eyes as LaPrawnda and Palaka kiss.

TIME CUT:

INT. PALAKA'S SHIP - DECK - NIGHT

Laprawnda and Palaka hug while the kids happily look on. Palaka steps away, pulls Atzi and Mossimo in for a back pat.

PALAKA

You two helped me. Now it's my turn to help you.

INT./EXT PALAKA'S SHIP - CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS/DECK - NIGHT

The ship rocks, anchored. Palaka yells from the porthole.

PALAKA

LaPrawnda, my love, now!

LaPrawnda raises the anchor. The ship takes off like a shot. Wind blows Atzi and Mossimo against the wheelhouse.

MOSSIMO

I need a regulation safety belt!

ATZI

Right here!

She kisses her bicep and grabs him before he blows away.

The barge zooms through mangrove roots, out of the bayou, up inlets, and back onto the Golden River. The Great Current spins the boat into the middle of the River, out of control. Mossimo grips onto her, queasy and greener than usual.

MOSSIMO

I feel like *I* ate those toadstools.

Palaka opens the porthole window.

PALAKA

When the tide's high, we go higher!
You kids know why they call Mantis
shrimps "sea splitters?"

ATZI

Trick question!

MOSSIMO

No, why?

PALAKA

You're about to find out.
LaPrawnda! PUNCH IT!

LaPrawnda cocks her giant claw back and HITS THE WATER. The force ROCKETS THE SHIP INTO THE AIR. The sails fill. The airborne ship floats over the Current.

Mossimo and Atzi CHEER. The Golden River glitters below, connecting inlets, ponds, bayous, all the way to the horizon.

MOSSIMO

The Golden River...

Atzi frowns and rubs her shoulder stump.

ATZI

It makes me feel small. And hungry.

Mossimo spots something in the river: an INKY BLACK TENDRIL. He tries to get a better look as the ship descends rapidly.

But the ship lands on the other end of the river, HARD. Waves roll the boat until it hits the shore, where it breaks. Everyone tumbles onto land. Palaka surveys the broken ship.

PALAKA

Nothin' tape can't fix.

LaPrawnda sticks supplies in Atzi's backpack.

LAPRAWNDA

These'll last you 'til Quebrada Grande. It's an estuary - got freshwater folks minglin' with saltwater! Just like us two here.

Palaka giggles and smooches LaPrawnda's cheek.

LAPRAWNDA (CONT'D)

If you're in trouble, tell a shrimp yer a friend of mine. You hear?

MOSSIMO

Thanks!

ATZI

Heard!

Mossimo and Atzi wave goodbye and leap into the water.

INT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Mossimo stares at nothing, troubled by what he saw earlier.

Atzi zips past him recklessly. Mossimo startles to attention.

ATZI

To Quebrada Grande!
(backtracks)
Uhh, unless you have a plan?

MOSSIMO

Nope. Last one to Quebrada Grande is a rotten fish egg!

The two swim off into the open river, teasing each other.

We hold on them a moment. Then drift down into the river...

To the withered, lifeless riverbed far below. A BLACK OIL BUBBLE rises from the sand... then another... and another...

The bubbles boil nastily, then POP.

And turn into an army of VICIOUS SLUDGE MONSTERS.

END OF EPISODE