



Voyage to Crusoe: A Novel

Leif Bailey

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Voyage to Crusoe is a novel about a man learning to value who he is, not what others want him to be.

In Leif Bailey's novel *Voyage to Crusoe*, a frustrated architect embarks on a perilous, life-changing trip to the South Pacific.

In the late 1980s, after Cliff's career and marriage collapse on the same day, his lifetime of patient waiting gives way to new, headstrong determination. He joins an old friend on a dangerous boat trip to Chile, where they plan to deliver weapons to rebels who are fighting against Pinochet's crumbling dictatorship. When the drop-off goes wrong, Cliff faces a long and treacherous trip back to America with just one person for company: the woman who he spent months trying not to fall in love with.

Most of the story takes place aboard the rugged *Staghound*, a sailing vessel whose secrets Cliff makes it his mission to learn and conquer. Lengthy descriptions of the boat, and copious use of sailing jargon, result in a spirit of authenticity and a strong atmosphere, while the book's glossary and sketches of the boat are helpful for imparting general understanding. This emphasis on the art of sailing also complements the book's central man-versus-nature conflict: Cliff overcomes his inexperience as he battles bad weather, damage to the vessel, and long nights at the helm. His loneliness is all the more palpable because it takes place before the widespread use of satellite phones and other world-shrinking technologies.

Cliff's isolation is reinforced by the small number of other people whom he encounters. He sets sail with Jon, a wealthy rule bender; with Mike, who is brash; and with Lena, who seems mysterious. He spends weeks bonding with them, seeing no one else until the brutal encounter with the ambitious drug dealer. Cliff's return trip is even lonelier and more fraught: he weighs the possibility of imprisonment against his odds of survival. Still, he gains confidence in his problem-solving skills, clarifies what he wants out of life, and learns to cope with disappointment and loss. In the end, Cliff ends up in the literal same place where he began, if he's in a much better place internally; ironically, it takes the near destruction of his life to discover what he truly wants from life.

Voyage to Crusoe is a novel about a man learning to value who he is, not what others want him to be.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 19, 2021)

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