

The Flood

“Ivy!”

I don't look up from the fish I am gutting. I have no interest in yet another debate with my little sister.

“Ivy, they found a boy!” Terra grabs my arm. “He was on some sort of raft when they found him this morning and pulled him in! Dad says he's speaking English!”

I look up. Terra's eyes are wide, and she's panting hard. I don't think she's joking.

“What?”

“Dad told me to come and get you! They're in the infirmary, hurry!”

I grab my shawl and head for the door.

“Stay here, Terra. Do not leave the hut until either me or Dad come back, okay?”

Terra nods at me, her slender body shaking as she slumps onto the floor.

I head towards the infirmary as fast as I can, my bare feet thumping on the wooden piers which interlock the houses of the village. I smile at the neighbours I pass, but keep my head down as much as possible so as not to be stopped. I turn the last corner and bang on the door of the infirmary. Dad opens the door and pulls me inside.

“Did you tell anyone where you were going?” he asks. I shake my head.

“Good. We need your help.”

Reseda takes my hand. She looks exhausted.

“I've healed the boy as best I can.”

I look from Dad to Reseda and back again, waiting. Neither of them say anything.

“And now you want me to translate?” I ask. “I've not learnt any English since Mum died, and all those books were burnt with her body remember!”

I can feel myself getting angry at the memory.

“Ivy, please,” Dad says, “You’re the only person in the village who can speak even the slightest bit of English. You’re the only one who can help us find out who this boy is, and where he’s come from.”

I suddenly feel like I’m not sixteen years old anymore, but twelve, having to learn how to cope without a mother. It’s time for me to be brave again. I nod.

Reseda leads me towards the back of the hut where a thick cloth is strung up hiding the straw bed which is kept in the corner. I know it’s there, because this is the last place I ever saw my mother alive. I pull back the curtain slightly and peer around at the boy. I turn to Reseda in shock.

“What’s wrong with him? Why is his skin like that? And his hair?”

Reseda shakes her head, and spreads her arms. “I’m not sure. I’ve never seen anything like it. Skin that light... and his hair... it’s like the colour of fire...”

“Are you sure he’s safe to be around? What if he’s contagious?”

“I don’t think it’s a disease. It seems... he was born like that.”

Her words don’t make me feel better. How can anyone be born so different? But what can I do? Besides, as terrified as I am of this strange boy, he fascinates me too. I take a deep breath and slip behind the curtain. I slowly move towards the bed, making enough noise so that he knows I’m coming. When he opens his eyes to look at me, I gasp. They are the colour of the water that surrounds us, that is everywhere you look, as far as the eye can see. Is this boy some sort of Water God? I reach out to touch him, but he pulls away from me.

“It’s okay,” I say, in English. “I want to... help.”

I reach out again and this time he lets me touch him. His skin feels the same as mine. And his hair does too. It’s beautiful. He is beautiful.

“I’m Ivy. Do you have a name?” It surprises me how quickly the English language returns to me. I thought I’d never have to use it again. We all thought it was a dead language.

“Tom,” he says. What a strange name.

“Tom. I need you to tell me where you’ve come from. What happened? Do you have a ...family?”

Tom just stares at me. I reach out and take his hand. The colours of our skin are so different from each other. He seems as fascinated by it as I am.

“I’m from the city,” he says after a long silence.

“The city?” I frown. I recognise the word. Perhaps from one of the books me and mum used to read.

“My dad died a few weeks ago. He knew we weren’t alone. He knew there were others out there somewhere. Like you. He was right.”

It takes me a while to take in what he is saying. He’s looking at me strangely. It’s not fear in his eyes anymore. It looks more like... hope. I’m not sure which I dislike more.

“They all thought he was insane. But I knew he wasn’t. Just before he died, he told me to find others, so I set sail on my own before anyone could stop me. I needed to prove he was right. And now I’ve found you and your people.”

My heart is racing. Is this true? Or is this all a trick? Is this beautiful boy some sort of demon come to disrupt our village? Are there really others? We thought we were the only ones left on the Earth. My mum had told me stories about before the Earth was flooded - that there were hundreds, even thousands of people.

“Tell me about the city.”

“It’s pretty big. But dad said it used to be bigger. Every year the water takes more of the land away- “

“Land?” My heart skips a beat. “You have land?”

Tom smiles. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a tiny wooden box which he then gives to me. “Open it.”

I don't know what it is that's inside. It's darker than wood, and when I touch it, it's soft and crumbly. I bring it to my face and sniff. It smells... fresh... But like nothing I've ever smelt before.

"It's soil," Tom says, "It's land, from the city. But there's so much more of it! Some has grass and trees growing from it."

I don't know what these words mean, but as I gaze at the soil and breathe in it's strange smell, I don't want to be told what grass and trees are, I want to *see* what they are.

"I knew that bringing some with me could be the only way to convince you."

"Convince us?"

"Ivy," he says, "You must come back to the city with me. You and all of your people. Surely it makes sense for all remaining life on Earth to be together?"

I don't know how to react. I want to help this boy, but I'm scared.

"If you come back with me, I can help you," Tom says. He looks at our hands which are still intertwined. Mine look tiny, and thin, and horrible compared to his. "We have food; you'll never be hungry again."

I know he's telling the truth. Despite being bruised and windswept, he's the healthiest looking person I've ever seen. He must get at least two good meals a day. Going with him really could be our best chance at survival.

I nod, "Okay."

Before he says anything else, I get up and return to Dad and Reseda. I explain mine and Tom's conversation to them.

"Are you insane, Ivy?" Dad reacts exactly the way I thought he would. "You expect us to just pack up the entire village and set off on some wild goose chase because a boy with strange skin and stranger hair told you to?"

“Dad,” I take a deep breath. “If we don’t go with him, we’ll all die. I think this is the best chance we have at surviving.”

“No,” Dad says, “We will wait until this boy has properly healed, and we shall send him back to where he came from, and that’s final.”

“They have land,” I say. Dad seems to stop breathing for a moment, “And they have enough food for everyone.”

“Land?”

I hand Dad the box and he looks at it wordlessly. He never used to believe mum’s stories, but I know he regrets it now she’s gone and the village is crumbling. Tears are forming in his eyes. He doesn’t want to give in to me. He doesn’t want to admit that his sixteen-year-old daughter can help the village more than he can.

“Fine,” he says quietly. “Reseda, pass the message that we are leaving. Gather all the fishermen, and tell them to bring their boats to the pier. Tell everyone to pack light. They have until sunrise. If they’re late, they’re left behind.”

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The village is in chaos. Dad is at the end of the pier, helping people climb into the boats, stopping some who are attempting to carry on bags bigger than me.

“Why are we taking the word of this boy?” One of the fishermen is furious and shouting at Dad, “Just because he says there’s land, doesn’t mean there is!”

“Birch,” Dad digs into his pocket and pulls out the tiny box of soil. Birch seems shocked for a minute, but quickly recovers.

“Even if there is land, how does that help us? Why do-“

“Look at the village,” Dad stops him, “The wood is rotting, it won’t last much longer. Look how thin and weak we all are. We can’t feed everyone anymore. We have to do this.”

As Birch looks at his son getting on his boat, the words finally hit home. He scowls but nods as he turns away and starts helping people.

“Ivy! It’s time to go,” Reseda calls.

I pick up our bag, and me and Terra get on either side of Tom to help him walk.

Birch is reluctantly letting us share his boat, and holds out his hand to Terra and Reseda as they climb in. Me and Dad have to climb in together, Tom sagging between us.

I look back at the tiny rocking village. It seems so different without all the people filling it. The small poorly built huts, and the fishing nets tossed aside on piers with planks of wood missing makes me realise how sad and hopeless our lives really are – or were. I wonder what Tom thinks.

Dad and Birch start to row, and the boat slowly moves away from the pier to the front of all the boats, and Dad signals for them to follow. Twenty boats. Just over a hundred people. A few years ago, there were twice as many.

“Tell your Dad to head South. I was heading North for about a day and a half when the storm hit and then you found me. All we can do is hope that by heading South we will find the city,” Tom says.

I pass on the message, and Dad nods. He looks worried. But it’s too late to go back now.



It feels like we have been in this boat for years. Terra is fast asleep in my Dad’s arms, who is also asleep, snoring gently, and I have taken over rowing. My eyes are stinging, and my arms are aching. Apart from the one lantern hanging on the front of the boat, and the floating lights from the boats behind us, it’s dark.

Birch is getting restless, “We should never have left the village.”

“We had to. We would have all starved if we’d have stayed,” I reply.

“And instead we are all going to die in this boat!” His voice is rising.

“Birch please, calm down,” I say.

“Don’t tell me to calm down Ivy! You have no idea what you’re doing! You’re as mad as your mother was with her books full of lies!” He’s stopped rowing and is pointing an angry finger at me. “You’re sixteen, for God’s sake! Why are we following orders from a—”

“That’s enough!” Dad has woken up, and him and Birch are squaring up to one another.

“You’ve doomed us all. You might be our Chieftain but you’ve messed up, well and truly this time,” Birch spits off the side of the boat. “I say we get rid of the boy. If he’s even a boy. Look at him! He’s not like us. How do we know he’s not a demon?”

Birch reaches out and grabs Tom. I’m screaming now, trying to pull him back to me. Terra is crying. Dad’s got hold of Birch by his shirt. The boat is rocking violently. We’re all going to die. And it’s all my fault.

“Stop!”

Reseda squawks loudly, stunning us all into silence. But she isn’t looking at us. She’s looking at something else.

At first, I can’t make it out. It looks like the pretty dancing lights the moonlight makes on the water on a calm night. As I look closer, I can see outlines of huge buildings. They don’t seem to be made of wood, but of something smoother. There’s so many of them, and they all emit this strange light.

“The city,” says Tom, smiling at us. The others don’t know what he’s saying, but they can guess. Dad grabs onto him but instead of hurting him, he is hugging him, and Birch is laughing. We’re all laughing.

I look at Tom, and I've never seen anyone more wonderful. Dad and Birch start rowing again, and we move slowly but surely towards the city. Tom is not a water god. And he's not a demon. He's a boy. Just a boy. But he has saved us all.