

The Journey

By Felicity Sreeves, May 2020

A harsh sun blazed in the sky. I blinked calmly in the stark light, feeling the acrid heat seep into my burning skin. The boat rocked gently; like a cradle it carried me through the brine. Leaning over the edge of its splintered wooden side, I looked down into the water.

There within the rolling hues I saw beyond my vague reflection a shape, stirring. Staring harder, I realised with strange disconnection that it was the small, plump foot of a baby. As I watched, the foot became part of image that showed a newborn child squirming under a vivid light. It was alone. Thick, inky clouds drew over the sky and gathered in a dark, swathing mass, covering me in shadows.

I turned to see waves forming in the vast expanse of churning blue which rippled like a blanket drying in the wind. Curiously I peered back into the darkening waters, and saw the image of a young girl. She sat on a bed, crying alone. Beside her, a photograph of a man and a woman glistened as a shaft of moonlight was reflected off the teardrops that lay upon it. Suddenly, the boat lurched, and the image shattered and spread across the bulk of water that had just hit the boat.

Returning in pieces, the image showed the girl smiling for an instant as she was carried away from the room by a man; a stranger. This was followed by images that formed and reformed over and over again to show the girl sobbing in her bed. Night after night, she lay alone. I shivered.

Slowly, it began to rain. At first the drops dampened my hair one by one, but it soon became a deluge. Sheets of water fell, and as the rolling waves turned wilder, the bottom of the boat became a pool of brine mingled with fresh rain. I clung to the weakened sides, heart pounding in fear as the water lapping at my ankles began to feel like cold chains.

A colossal wave came out of the darkness and loomed in front of me. My wide eyes saw within it an older girl. She stood beside two gravestones and stared in despair at the same photograph of a man and a woman I had seen earlier. Before my fragile boat could break into dangerous shards at the crash of the wave, I jumped into the swirling grasp of the water.

At the feeling of an icy cold closing over my head, I almost gasped for air. I fought to swim upwards, but my resolve weakened as the effort became too much. Kicking and pulling myself weakly towards the surface, I watched above me the same girl. She was cautiously approaching a blind man who sat at the edge of a road. She seemed unsure of herself, hesitating with every step.

The blind man turned towards the girl as I used my last ounce of strength to burst through the waves to gasp a breath. It was then that I saw the shadow of another boat upon the waves. Some courage returned, I swam towards it.

Reaching out, the blind man spoke to the girl, and she offered him some bread. His grateful, beaming smile was quickly matched by one on the girl's own face as a hand reached down and yanked me up into a boat that appeared as fragile as my own had been. There was a man on board, whose look of fear was replaced with joy as I picked up an oar to help him row. He did not speak, and nor did I as we made our way together across the waves.

The sea calming, the dark skies dispersed and other vessels became visible. I could see other people struggling in the surf and one by one, we helped them. With each person that came aboard, a new face lit up with a glorious smile, thankful of being rescued. Incredibly, the boat became larger and stronger with every new member.

Together, we found land. It stretched out across the horizon, welcoming us into the oasis it offered. Coming ashore, I blinked in the cool evening sunshine, and woke up.

The sudden end to my dream startled me, and I stared around my familiar room in momentary wonder. Sighing, I stretched and arose, pausing only for a moment to look lovingly at the photograph of a man and a woman beside my bed.