

Ava and the Whale-King

Ava looked up at the sky, as she always did in the evening, after the work was done, and they had eaten. Her father said it would be another five years before the water came, but she watched the skies, waiting.

Ava had never seen water, except in the bottles the Corporation gave them, and in the kitchen of their Block. Her mother had told her stories. She was from Rostock, a world covered in it. Her mother had played with the fish when she was a little girl. They were beautiful, and they came in every color.

Her father was from Mars, where everyone came from. He wasn't rich though, so he had been forced to leave. He'd gone to Rostock and he and her mother had fallen in love. But you weren't allowed to have a baby there, and so they came here, to Trent, to work to make the planet better. Ava didn't want to work all day. It was hot and she got tired.

Her father said that if they worked, worked until the water came, they wouldn't have to work ever again. But the water was supposed to come from the sky and it never did. Her mother said the water wasn't here yet, and that was why it couldn't fall from the sky. If the water came, she could play with the fish all day, and never have to work again.

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The Whale-king was so very far from home he worried he might never find it again. He had been searching for a long time, for the blue-green ball he came from. The lights in the blackness did their best to keep him company, but he missed the songs. No one had heard his song for many, many years, and he saw no others.

Years ago, when the sounds of others were all around him, he sang to them every day and they would sing back. They would sing about what they ate, about who they loved, about their children, even if they were far away.

The Whale-king had not heard the songs since the seas shook that day and everything fell upwards. He'd looked down and saw a blue-green ball beneath him, smaller and smaller as he drifted further away. He fell, until he learned to move against the falling. Whenever he came near a ball now, he moved towards it, but it was never the one he came from.

Grey balls, blue ones, black ones, never home. He was tired and couldn't go much further when he came across the yellow ball. It wasn't the one he was looking for, but he no longer had the strength to stop himself from moving towards it. He fell and fell; the pull too strong for him to do anything but try to slow himself down.

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Ava saw a speck, something black. There was never anything in the sky, not one thing. Maybe it was the water, earlier than her parents had predicted. She ran to them. Her mother was already asleep, exhausted from the day's work. Her father told her off; "It's too soon," he muttered, nestling into his bed. She left their Block as soon as he turned his back on her. Outside, the black spot glistened in the darkness. It slowly grew and grew.

The black spot was still far away, but didn't seem to grow any bigger. It seemed to slow as it fell from the sky. It moved behind the hill where she had worked all day and she heard a thick, heavy drumroll very far away. She was so, so tired, but her feet carried her towards the sound.

She scrambled up the hill; there was a giant thing there, black and grey, blue-green, glistening. It had a tail, and fins. A fish, a giant fish. She ran towards it. It was bigger than a block, bigger even than the Corporation building. She reached its tail and moved toward the front, trailing her fingers along its side, to see if it had a face. Maybe it would play with her.

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The Whale-king felt the pull of this unfamiliar ball push him down into the black sand beneath him. It was making it hard for him to breathe. He spotted something to his left and shivered as it moved towards his eye. It was a little thing. It had little eyes, peering in to his, curious.

The whale-king knew he was going to sleep soon. He would rest for a while, maybe forever. He was sorry he would never find the others, or ever again hear their songs. The little thing made sounds, comforting, but wrong. He saw memories of the great oceans, so familiar to him, in the little thing's eyes. Maybe he could sing one last time.

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Ava cried. The fish was dying, she knew. It needed water, and there was only sand here. She cried, and pressed her cheek against the fish. The fish opened its mouth and the loudest sound she had ever heard came out. "Don't die!" she cried, pressing her fingers against its glistening skin.

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The Whale-king felt water from the little thing, salt water on his lip, and he sang to his friends one last time. He was glad to taste the salt sea one last time. One last time.