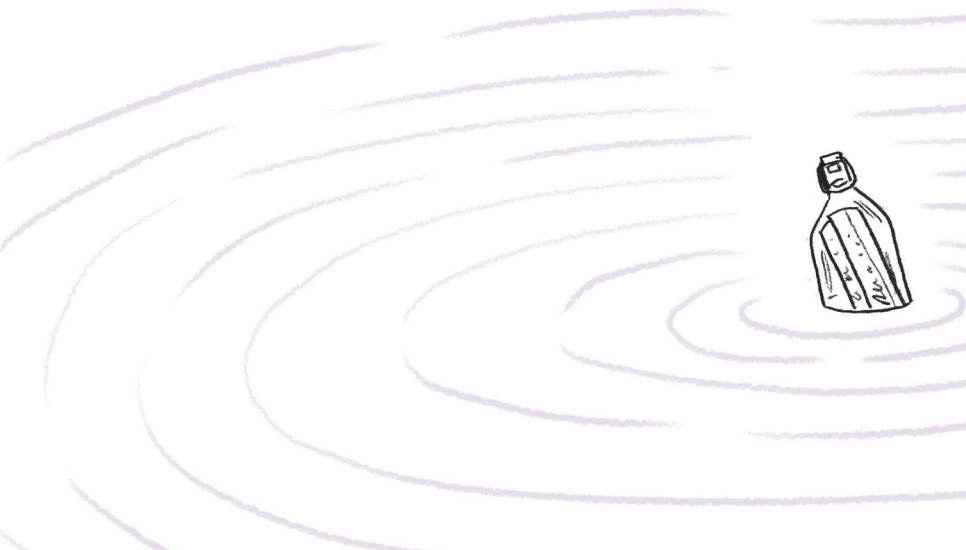


OTIS

Dear Dayv and Jeenee,

Weev been at sea on Yarrow's bowt. Ownly a lot's happund and now we have to get to land. If you get this, try to find us. Weer hedding for Egg's dad's hows:

Pengelly Farm
Bodmin Moor
Cornwall

Also I'm sorry abowt evrything I said. And evrything I did. I didunt meen it.

BE PREPARED

The government said to
stop using plastic and
time all our showers and
turn off the heating, but
it wasn't enough.

The government gave
instructions to comfort us.
To make us feel we stood
a chance, when we haven't got
a single hope.

PART 1
LAND

PARIS



If you'd asked me back then whose fault it was, I'd have said Dave's probably, for marrying my mum. Or Mum for dumping me and Otis in London instead of taking us on the honeymoon. Or Otis's for existing full stop.

Now I know different. That the flood was up to all of us. Me and you and the whole flipping world. That we could have stopped it, if we'd wanted. If we'd been willing to give up enough. If we'd been willing to say no to the people in charge.

But I didn't know that then. I didn't know about the boat. I didn't know there was something going on with the ice caps. I didn't know the world was about to end.

I just knew I was going to be stuck with my not-quite stepbrother and my mum's weirdo sister in this weirdo communal house in Camberwell for five entire days while Mum and Dave larked about in Malaga being all married.

I mean, who wouldn't be peeved?

OTIS

things i hayt abowt dayv

1. his dreds ar a mess
2. so ar his shoos
3. the muzic he lissens to is NOT GOOD
4. he dusunt stop singing
5. nurs is a gurls job

PARIS



Otis was steaming and he hadn't even been there before – I suppose 'cos we'd only known him and Dave (that's his uncle) for a year. He'd spent the entire car ride from Brighton flicking a button on his coat and jiggling his knee, so that even though I had my ear buds in it was bugging me.

'Omigod can you just, like, stop that?' I snapped.

'Omigod, like, no!'

He was always mimicking me, which was pretty childish for a twelve-year-old, I reckoned, especially one who thought he was the Big Man with his army boots and his skin-fade haircut and his dead dad's dog tags round his neck. But when I told on him, Mum just said I had to 'have some flaming empathy, Paris'.

And I did. Well, some. I mean, I know it wasn't his fault his mum died in the second pandemic. Not his fault his dad had to go off to fight in the war that came after. Not his fault that his nan couldn't cope with him so his uncle got lumbered – Dave, his dad's little brother, and my mum's husband now.

But it wasn't my fault, neither. 'You're such a—'

‘That’s enough!’ Mum was having none of it. She’d twisted in the passenger seat and given me a look that meant business.

I slumped. ‘I could have stayed at home.’

‘By yourself?’ Mum laughed. ‘You’re eleven, not eighteen.’

‘I’d be fine. I can use a microwave.’

‘Because that’s all you need to know, is it? To be a grown-up?’

‘Or gone to Tully’s,’ I muttered.

Or anyone’s. Anywhere where Otis wasn’t, anyway. With his flicking and his jiggling and his notebook that he only had because some counsellor had told him to ‘write down his feelings’ – and not on his phone ’cos Dave had put limits on screentime and so Otis wanted to save that for messaging his deadbeat mates.

‘No, you couldn’t,’ said Mum, turning back round, but keeping her eye on me in the flip-down mirror. ‘Tully’s mum’s got better things to do the week after New Year than mind another kid. Besides, the pair of you need some time together. Like chickens.’

‘Like what?’

‘When chickens don’t get on, you have to shut them up together in a shed.’ She eyed Otis. ‘They soon sort it out.’

I made a noise, like ‘yeah, right’.

‘How do you even know that?’ I asked. ‘Since when have you kept chickens?’

'Saw it on telly, didn't I.' She raised an eyebrow, still dyed dark from the wedding. 'Now buck up, love, we're nearly there.'

I sighed, and let my head rest on the window of Dave's taped-together Micra, wishing I had the guts to stand up to my mum. And betting for all the world right then that my dad – wherever he was and whoever he was – drove a better car than this tin can.

We were well into the city by then, the streets getting narrower and the traffic more jammed. No hills, not like where we lived – no sea to stare out over, no big sky on the horizon. Just flat land packed with scraggy-looking houses and scraggier people.

Gatwick – where they were flying from – was miles behind. When we'd gone past I'd almost asked them to change their minds – Mum and Dave. Begged them to just stop there and take us. 'Cos how was I supposed to cope in a commune, living with a bunch of randomers? I don't like lentils. I don't know about gardening. I don't know about anything much except what I learnt off the telly and YouTube and in Tully's bedroom, i.e. how to braid hair and do eyeliner and calculate how much you loved someone by the letters in your names.

But that was the one thing me and Otis agreed on: neither of us wanted to watch those two slobber over each other with almost no clothes on for almost a week.

And five days wasn't so bad, I told myself. Five days and they'd be driving the same road again to fetch us. So we could go back to school. So they could go back to the hospital and being midwives. And perhaps it'd be okay. Not the being-locked-up-with-Otis-like-chickens thing, but my cousin Jonah was nearly nine now, and he might not be so bad. And Yarrow wasn't the worst, even if she didn't believe in mobile phones or gel nails, or microwave anything.

It'll be fine, I thought, as Otis wrote in his notepad and jiggled his knee and flicked his stupid button for the eleventy-millionth time.

It'll be fine, I thought, as we turned right at the traffic lights and drove up Camberwell Grove.

It'll be fine, I thought, as we lugged our rucksacks out of the boot and trudged up the muddy path to the cracked-wall mansion that my aunt and her 'comrades' called home.

And it *was* fine.

Until it wasn't.

SEE THE SEASIDE

What do you think of
when you think of the sea?
A custard-coloured beach in a
bright slice of sunlight?
A flock of bobbing yachts in a
dinky little harbour?
A hill of hugger-mugger holiday cottages
in sugared-almond pinks and blues?

I don't suppose you notice
the dirt and the murk,
the bins brimming with litter,
and watching it all from high up on a hill,
a four-storey block of pebble-dashed flats,
at the top of them: me.

PARIS



'You've got to be joking me.' Otis was staring at the bunk beds. 'I'm not sharing.'

'Me neither,' I said. 'Not with boys.'

'Gender's irrelevant,' said Jonah, his eyes wide and his curls sticking every way but the right one. 'Stella says. And anyway, you can both have the top ones. I'm all right on the bottom.'

'Who's Stella?' said Otis. 'That woman with all the hair and the nose ring?'

Jonah snorted. 'No, that's Luna.' He bobbed his head from side to side, like he was singing inside to no music. 'She's just a person. Stella's different. She's in charge of things. Her dad was famous. That's how we got the house.'

I'd not seen Stella since I was Jonah's age – nearly three years ago – so maybe she wouldn't be so scary any more. Or I could just stay out of her way.

'Do you want to see the goats?' said Jonah. 'They're pregnant. They'll lick your fingers and your face if you let them.'

'You're all right.' Otis flung his bag on one of the bunks,

climbed up behind it. 'I'm staying here.'

'You'd like the garden,' I tried. 'It's like a jungle. You can play your war games out there.'

But Otis was ignoring me. Probably annoyed I even knew he'd do that. But I'd seen him, with his S.A.S. handbook and his camouflage hat and his stick for a gun, yomping round the yard at our house like he's already signed up, even though they won't let him in the army till he's sixteen.

So I ignored him right back, and followed Jonah down four clattering staircases, along the scuffed-paint corridor, past the living room, the office, the communal kitchens, and out the back door.

And that's when I saw it.

'Oh. My. God.'

'God isn't real,' said Jonah. 'But we respect all faiths here.'

'No, I mean . . .' I blinked and stared again. No, it was definitely there. No trees, no green anything. Just a massive wooden boat. And I mean *massive*: tall as a normal house. Big enough for a bunch of people to live in. A hundred of them. People or pirates. 'What actually happened?'

'Oh,' said Jonah. 'You mean the ark.'

OTIS

things i hayt abowt this hows

1. it smells funni
2. to menni peepl
3. the peepl ar weerd

PARIS



'You expecting a flood or something?' Otis snorted.

I'd made him come down by threatening to tell Stella that he liked to milk goats. I was already regretting it.

'Exactly that,' said Jonah, all matter-of-fact.

'In the middle of London?' Otis was killing himself. 'I mean, that is proper mental, you do know that?'

'Mental isn't a nice word,' said Jonah. 'But I don't mind. School can do that to you. Stella says—'

'Never mind what Stella says,' I blurted. 'I mean, seriously, what is it for?'

I'd seen boats before, but this one wasn't like the others down the marina – all flashy with chrome and motors. This really was like the ark in the Bible. All wood and nails and thick, thick paint. And a mast and all. I supposed the sails must be put away for now.

'Like *he* said.' Jonah nodded at Otis. 'For the flood.'

I wanted to ask, 'What flaming flood?' but I didn't want Otis to poke any more fun so I let it go, let Jonah get on with it.

'It's big enough for forty humans. That's more than all

of us here. And it's got everything. I'll show you.'

And so he did. Led us up a plank and into the bulk – the 'hull', he called it – where men were doing something with buckets of varnish. The place stank, like the woodwork room at school, or the time Barry next door creosoted his fence and Mum lost it because our side had all these weird drips, like the wood had been murdered. And it was big in there – bigger than you'd think from the outside, like the TARDIS off *Doctor Who*. Like you could get lost if you wanted to. Or, worse, didn't.

'How many decks are there?' I asked, like I knew what I was talking about.

'Three,' said Jonah. 'The top deck, where the sails are. Then under that, one for us with the kitchen and the beds *et cetera*.'

He said those last two words like he was copying them from someone older.

'And the bottom one' – he held up his hands like he was a magician and this was his 'ta-dah!' – 'for the animals.'

'Animals?' Otis snorted again. 'What animals? Lions and tigers?'

Jonah shook his head. 'Don't be silly. You can't milk a tiger. Anyway, I told you. The goats. Also the chickens and pigs. Maybe some rabbits, only Yarrow's allergic so she's worried about being stuck with them for months.'

Otis shook his head. 'Are you for real?'

Jonah frowned. 'I think so,' he said. 'I don't mind if you laugh, by the way. Most people do.'

'No surprise,' said Otis. 'I mean, come on. This is ment—pretty weird.'

Jonah shrugged. 'They won't be laughing when the water comes.'

Otis just sighed at that. I said nothing.

Looking back, I should have, shouldn't I? I should have yelled, 'What the hell are you on about?' And maybe then we could have rung Mum and told her to forget the holiday and come back and get us, and take us somewhere. Anywhere. But I just thought it was one of their mad schemes – the commune, I mean. Like when they were going to get mobile phones banned because they were messing with our brains, or said masks didn't work, or the second pandemic wasn't even real. So I left it. I just left it.

More fool me.

'Shall I show you the storeroom?' Jonah said then.

'Go on,' I said, and clopped after him along a narrow corridor hung with lightbulbs in wire cages and smelling of fence.

The storeroom was like a corner shop. Every shelf was deep with tins. Hundreds and hundreds of them – potatoes, peas, baked beans, even meat. Sacks of rice lined one wall from the floor to the ceiling. Enough not just for a one-off flood, but for months of it. But that wasn't the weirdest bit.

Through a door in the storeroom was something called 'desalination' – a load of pipes and pumps and bottles.

'It's for the seawater,' Jonah explained. 'To take the salt out so you can drink it. You can do it with wee too.'

Otis said a bad word then. I nearly did too. 'Omigod. You do not drink wee.'

'I'll do what I have to,' said Jonah, all cheery like he's saying he might eat a strawberry or an ice pop. 'We all will.'