

The Arrival

The tick of the clock. The rustle of folded paper. The scrape of the chair. The drip from the tap. The click of the brass clasp. The sigh from my wife. The snuffle from my daughter.

We talk. We eat. We walk. We cry. I leave.

I leave. The train tears me away from the place where monsters creep in the shadows and hopes are swallowed by harsh realities. I leave them to the smoke and the dust – my wife and my daughter – the only family I have. I leave them to the tentacles and the teeth in the hope that I can find something better. Hope.

I eat. I sleep. I watch. I cry. I write. I wait. We sail. We rock. We squeeze. We arrive.

We arrive. The buildings tower towards the sky like great mountains of brick and cement. People bustle like ants; they are desperate for land after months sailing on the bottomless blue. This is it. The land of promise.

We walk. We queue. We wait. We talk. We explain. We beg. We plead. We show. They look. They listen. They check. They type. They stamp. They accept.

They accept. I am given a passport with my name on. What is a name in a place such as this? I am a grain of sand on a beach: lost in the banks and fearful of being swept away at any moment. Am I the alien or are they? There are strange sights and sounds, strange noises and smells. Nothing here is familiar. I am lost and I do not understand. I must find somewhere to stay – somewhere to sleep.

I walk. I look. I gesture. I mouth. I walk. I look. I stare. I stumble.

I stumble. A kind man helps me up and tries to understand what I need. He cannot understand me but I am able to draw pictures and, at last, he knows what I need. He takes me to a place of rest. It does not look like anything I have seen before. No ticking. No scraping. No dripping. Not rustling. Worst of all, there is no sigh from my wife or snuffle from my daughter. I miss them more than anything in the world. My heart throbs as I think of my home. I get out the photo frame and nail it to the wall above my bed.

I wake. I dress. I leave. I search. I search. I ask.

I ask. A kind lady helps me. I am looking for somewhere to find food. Everything looks so different here but I am determined to try. She takes me to a strange flying boat which sails across the sky. I have to trust her.

I sit. I meet. I listen.

I listen. A woman shows me her passport which is just like mine. Her eyes are dark with fear and sadness. She was taken from her home and forced to work in treacherous conditions.

She escaped and fled until she found safety here. There feels like some form of solidarity between us, a kind of kinship, both aliens in this place. Desert chasms line her eyes. I've seen it before – it's the kind of tiredness that scars.

We land. We hug. I leave. I search. I feel. I taste. I examine.

I examine. The food here is so strange. I do not recognise it and cannot find what I am looking for. I feel frustrated to have to choose from items so alien to me. A man and his son see my struggle and come to help. They give me food to try, make recommendations and pile my basket high with delicious items. They show me what to eat and how to eat it. After some time, they tell me about their home and where they came from. They talk about how people were taken from the streets by monsters and how *they* ran. They left everything that they knew and loved and they hid – deep in the darkness – until someone offered them a safe passage here. We talk for hours; their home sounds a lot like mine.

We share. We talk. We cry. We play. We sing. I laugh. I breathe. I relax.

I relax. It is good to meet people who have run like I did. It is good to meet other arrivals like me. I know that I need a job but they are hard to find in a world where I know nothing. I am nothing here and I have nothing. I try lots of different roles but I keep getting things wrong. Despite being successful in my home country, everything seems to work differently here. I know that I can't give up. I need the money. I keep my head down and I work harder than I ever have before.

I stick. I build. I paint. I post. I fix. I weld. I talk.

I talk. I talk to a man at the factory who is a stranger like me. He tells me about his life and how he fought courageously for his country. He tells me about the destruction and the ruin. He tells me about the death and the loss. I listen intently; I suddenly realise how many 'others' there are here who have stories just like me. We have all fled homes in search of safety and a better life. I thank him for his story.

I work. I work. I work. I save. I post. I hope. I wait.

I wait. Every day, I pace the dockside, gazing out at the sea like a shipwrecked sailor desperate for sight of land. One day, I see them. My wife and daughter clamber clumsily along the dockside and leap into my arms. I weep tears of joy as I embrace them tightly. They have arrived.

They ask. They look. They listen. I show. I introduce. I explain. We walk. We settle.

We arrived.

