Raging Ice

1041

 “Father,” I wheeze, as I trudge through the deepening snow, flakes flurrying into my face, frosting my hair, “Is it usually this cold when you go out?” He doesn’t respond right away. We keep walking, the lights on our heads make the snowflakes visible as they fall.

I’m invested with what I can see, opposed to what I can’t when he answers, “It’s always cold.”

 “But do you think there might be a storm coming?” I ask incredulously. He keeps walking in his silence. Here it is impossible to know when a storm is coming. There are no clouds to identify, and even if there were, it’s too dark to see them in the sky. The world for a long time has been drifting through space, away from its original orbit and the sun that kept us warm. The world iced over and now it's just a miserable floating ice ball. Maybe someday we will find the sun. Or maybe someday I can join my ancestors in a warmer place.

“Do you at least think we will get enough meat?” I ask, looking to get a response out of him. Mother and my newborn brother little Dan were waiting in the village for our return.

 “We’ll get what we get,” he says almost as coldly as the wind blowing on my face.

 The wind starts to pick up more and I can feel our group huddle closer together trying to stay warm. We keep trudging, the snow slowly rising to ankle level. The crunch of our feet becomes inaudible as the wind gets louder and more fierce. Snow swirls around us, clouding our lights, letting us see only so far ahead. Suddenly a gust of wind full of snow tears through us, knocking me off my feet. I hit the ground with a hard thump and I feel my head start to throb. I sit up and look around. Surrounding me were walls of blowing snow, so fierce it came in waves, rising then crashing down. I look around trying to find my group but can’t see.

I start to run, yelling, “Father! Father, where are you!” I hear no response, just the rumbling of the wind.

 “Father!” I tried again. “Please! Where are you?” The wind picks up my voice and carries my words away, drowning them so they can never reach anyone.

 “Father,” I whimper, knowing it is no use. I plop into the snow and wait. The storm keeps raging as I wait for either a death or a rescue.

I wake up in a small pile of snow and slowly sit up. *Where am I?* I think as my surroundings slowly settle. I only see darkness, no lights. The stars glitter above me, dancing and glimmering as if laughing at me like they know something that I am yet to realize. Then it hits me. There’s no one by me. I don't know where I am and how to get back. I lay back down in my little shelter of snow. Is it worth it? I wonder. Should I bother to even get up only to continue to live in this cold, desolate place, or do I stay here, and let myself freeze so I can go join my ancestors away from this god forsaken place? My stomach rumbles loudly, telling me to get food. I don’t listen to it and keep lying in the snow. I can feel myself drifting upwards when it rumbles again yanking me back down to the cold ice.

“Get up,” it grumbles.

“No,” I tell it.

“I’m hungry.”

“I’m not moving to get you food. Besides, we aren't going to find anything out here.” Silence pursues. Even the wind seems to have stopped at the conversation between my stomach and I.

“I said get up!” It yells suddenly. I sigh as I stand up and start to move, letting my stomach now control me. I keep wandering for what seems like hours, my stomach determined to find something to satisfy it. That is when I see a bright light in the distance. I start walking towards it and it seems to get…higher?

I start to walk faster towards the light and start to smell the burning. Of course. The flames rise to lick the sky clean as I get closer and I can see the outlines of crumbling shacks from my once put together village. Smoke starts to run into my nostrils and eyes, stinging them but I keep running. I run into the flames, screaming for my family, for anyone, and yet I don’t get a response. Trying to find something, the flames start to lap at me as I splash through the melting ice. That’s when I see a moving bundle of cloth. Stooping down, I grab it and cradle it as the familiar cries of little Dan come from it.

I run out of the fire panting, clutching Dan, my breathing coming in short heavy heaves. I trudge to the outskirts where the fire won’t reach but where I can stay warm. I sit on the ice, and watch the flames dance. They flicker and swirl around as if in some sort of non ritualistic dance. They bounce and dive, enveloping whatever is in front or behind them. I watch, horrified and curious, as they perform this dance until they slowly start dying. One by one, a flame will find nothing more to consume and slowly stops moving. It becomes smaller and closer to the ground, until it’s just a small flicker in the black dust. There’s astonishment in Dan’s eyes as he watches them die away. We sat there for another hour or so after the last flame died just to see if it might come alive again. Or if anything would come alive again.

“It’s astonishing isn't it?” I ask Dan, knowing he wont be able to answer. “It’s astonishing,” I continue, “that we are the only ones not dead or gone. Why is that?” Silence answers me. I’ll never know why the fire started or how it did. I’ll never know why it was me and him that survived, and why it was us that sat on that everlasting ice. But, maybe someday, I will.