

Chapter 9

As you look at the map, you notice there's a small hut near the water. From the watermill you're coming from, the hut is actually closer than Morph. You show Mira the map. "Look, this is closer, and it looks like it's got a dock. Maybe someone there can sail us out?"

"Worth a shot," Mira shrugs. "The faster we can be done with this, the better."

And so, instead of heading back to the main road, you follow a smaller path along the water and hope it leads to the hut. "I was wondering," you start as you walk, "this Santa. I haven't heard of him before. Who is he?"

Mira laughs at your question, which offends you. She could have just told you who he was without mocking you for not knowing. "Why he's the great gift giving deity of course, giving nice gifts to those who deserve it and coal to those who don't." She looks at you, studying your reaction. "And he's not real. I made him up a while ago to get back at some people who annoyed me. I told them that if they kept it up Santa would give them coal instead of nice gifts. Then I pulled some strings to make him believable. I didn't expect it to actually spread as far as it did," she laughs.

"I'm starting to understand why you got cursed," you say, not sure if you should be mad or impressed that her lie caught on. Mira shrugs and smiles innocently.

A while later, you reach a small hut with straw roofing, resting right next to the water. On a chair by the dock sits a man who looks at peace as he fishes. He's got short brown hair and a brown moustache. "Excuse me," you say carefully. "Hi, sorry to bother you. I'm Pernille, and this is Mira. We need to get out onto the lake and were wondering, since you have a dock here, if there was any chance you could sail us out. We would pay you of course."

Without looking at you, he simply responds, "I leant my boat to someone at Fomo."

"Okay, well thank you anyway," you turn to leave.

"Wait. Sit." He says and you feel for some reason that there's no room for argument with him. So you both grab an empty seat and sit down. "You seem tense, you look like you need to relax." He leans back in his chair and closes his eyes.

"Oh, we're quite alr..." you start, but he shushes you. "No talking, just relaxing." You and Mira look at each other, neither of you daring to go against him and you don't know why. You sit in silence for a while, the only sound coming from the wind or the rippling water. You find yourself getting lost in the peacefulness of it all, taking in the scent of the lake and fresh rain. The clouds have still not let up, and you wonder if it ever will until you've broken this curse. No, you shouldn't think of the curse, you should try to relax. So you let your mind wander, you let them drift away. It's surprisingly relaxing just sitting there, doing absolutely nothing.

"What do you need to go out on the lake for?" his voice startles you out of your little trance. It takes a bit to register what he asked you, but when it does you fumble for the map.

“I was given this map and I want to see what’s at the X,” you say showing him the map. He looks at the map, then at you in a way that shows he knows it’s not the whole story. He doesn’t question it though.

“If you head down to Backslide, you can acquire some homebrewed ale. Bring that to the sailor at Fomo, and that’s a sure way to get him to sail you out.”

“We were just going to head to Morph since it’s closer,” you pocket the map again.

He giggles, a surprisingly infectious sound. “They haven’t used their docks in months. The captain’s out of drift, so to speak.”

You and Mira look at each other with the same disappointed look. That means more days travelling for you.

“Alright, we’ll head to Fomo then. Thanks for the tip about the ale.” You and Mira get up and you feel almost sad about leaving. You don’t know why, but there’s something about this place, this man, that makes you want to stay and just hang out and relax. Which is strange, because you don’t know this man. There’s just something about his energy that makes you trust him.

He nods. “Tell them the ale is for Ronn Duckson and they’ll know what to make.” He focuses his attention back on his fishing and relaxation.

“What about you? What is your name?” you ask, but he doesn’t answer. He’s either ignoring you or too focused on his relaxation to have heard you. Realising you won’t get any more out of him, you set out on the main road again, leaving this tranquil place behind.