

NAIYER MASUD

Glassy Dock

Each wave that strikes out to embrace the shore
roils up a hundred more when it departs.

—Nazīrī Nishāpūrī

And with such luck and loss
I shall content myself
Till tides of turning time may toss
Such fishers on the shelf

—George Gascoigne

I

EIGHT YEARS MY UNCLE KEP ME WITH IM, an loved me bout as much as anybody could I reckon, but then he had to find somewheres else for me. The whole thin wat'n his fault, or mine neither. First he thought I'd quit stutterin after I'd been out to his place awhile an got all calmed down, an I thought so too. We couldn of knowed folks would make me some kind of freak show, the way they treat a crazy.

I'd hang around the dusty little main street where evybody strolled along an did ther shoppin, an they'd listen to me real curious, curiouiser than with anybody else, an whether I said anythin funny or not they'd bust out laughin. After a few days thins had got so bad that if I tried to say anythin, even back at home, the words'd just bounce off my teeth an lips an roof a my mouth an get swallowed up again like waves hittin the beach an goin right back. I'd finally get so tongue-tied the veins in my neck would get all swole up an my throat an chest felt like somethin was crushin em an I couldn breathe, I'd get scared I was gonna die from no air. I'd start pantin for breath an leave off wherever I was in the sentence,

an then I'd start the whole thin over again when I'd got my breath back. My uncle'd get mad me. "You aready said that," he'd say. "Finish up."

That was the only thin ever got im riled up at me. But my problem was I couldn start in the middle of things. Some of the time he'd have the patience to listen an others he'd just wave his hand an say "Never mind, never mind."

But then the same way I couldn start in the middle, I couldn just cut off like that an not finish what I was sayin. I'd get all het up tryin to get it out an finally he'd just walk away with me still standin there stutterin to myself. If anybody had of seen me they'd of thought I b'longed in a loonyhouse.

I liked wanderin around the main street though, an sittin around with folks wherever a group gathered. Maybe I couldn contribute much to the talk but I made up for it by doin lots a extra listenin an repeatin thins people said in my mind. I'd get uncomfortable sometimes, but I was pretty happy because at least folks dit'n dislike me here, an more'n anythin cause my uncle was so fond of me an saw to evythin I ever could want or need.

Then I noticed he'd seemed kinda worried for a few days. He'd started havin these long talks with me like he never done before. He'd come up with some question it took a long time to answer an then he'd just listen real patient, an not interrupt. If I got winded he'd just wait, an oncet I got back to what I'd been sayin he was still listenin an concentratin. Even when it took so long I was sure he was gonna lose his temper again an my tongue would start to get all knotted up, he dit'n get mad, he just looked at me an stayed quiet.

It only took three days a this for my tongue to start loosenin up. It was like somebody liftin a big stone offa my chest, an I started dreamin about bein able to just talk like anybody else, easy an plain. I started savin up all the thins I was gonna say to people. But the fourth day Uncle calls me over real close. He starts talkin a me bout I don't know what-all an then he just goes quiet. I figure he's gonna ask one a them hard-to-answer questions, but all of a sudden he says, "I got a new wife comin day after tomorrow."

My face all brightened up about gettin a new auntie, but his face is all worried, an finally he says, "She'll go crazy if she hears the way you talk. She'll just die."

The next day all my stuff was packed up. Before I had a chance to ask any questions, my uncle took me by the hand an said "Let's go."

*

He dit'n say a word to me the whole trip. But when some man asked he said, "Boats wants im."

Then they both got to talkin bout Boats. I remembered Boats, too. When I'd first come to live out uncle's way, Boats made his livin by goin around to fairs an wherever people got together, an doin a kinda clown act. He had this little pink sail he'd tie to his back—maybe that's why he'd got the name Boats, or maybe he come up with the act because that was aready his name. Anyways the sail would get to blowin when there was any wind an Boats would move forward like the sail was makin im do it. He did the greatest imitation you ever saw of a boat caught in a storm. You'd swear you was seein right in front of you the winds all angry an the big loomin-up waves an a whirlpool spinnin a mile a minute ready to suck that boat right under. The sounds he could do! The wind howlin, the waves slappin, the quiet in the center of the whirlpool, even the flutterin of the sails all came out his mouth plain as anythin. In the end the "boat" would sink. Little kids loved it, an some of the older boys'd watch it too, but he only done it if they was a good wind up. But if the wind died down now, the kids'd get even more excited an start yellin "Smoke, smoke!"

I never seen nobody smoke tobacco like Boats did. He used evy kind of tobacco, in evy way anybody could smoke it, an when the air was still he'd do tricks with smoke that you woulda sworn just wat'n possible. First he'd let out a coupla puffs a smoke, then he'd step back an pat an turn his hands in the air like he was makin a sculpture outa some kinda really mushy clay. An sure enough, the smoke would take on a shape that looked just like whatever he wanted it to be, an it'd stay there in mid-air a pretty long time. Now some of his acts the kids wat'n allowed to watch. When he was doin one of these ones the men would quick close up around im two or three deep an we could only tell he was in there by the flappin sail pokin up over the heads of the audience an the sound of evybody laughin.

A year after I'd come out to Uncle's though, Boats's voice had went bad an he'd been took with a terrible cough. Doin his acts, he'd used lotsa different voices an made all sorts a sounds, but now when he opened his mouth, more'n likely he'd go into a coughin fit an take almost as long to finish his sentence as I would of. So he stopped doin his acts, an even stopped comin through our little town, an after the first year I dit'n see him no more.

*

On our way we passed through a lot a little settlements, just a few houses sometimes around a dock on the Big Lake. My uncle knew people wherever we went, an he'd tell em Boats had ast for me. I dit'n understand, but I wat'n gonna ask no questions. Inside I was sore at my uncle an dit'n wanta go off an live somewheres without im. But my uncle dit'n look too happy neither—he sure dit'n look like somebody fixin to bring home a new wife.

Finally we come to this town bout as dirty as anythin I ever seen. They was a run-down glass factory there where evybody worked, an from anywhere in town you could see these ugly chimneys belchin smoke. Layers of soot had settled on all the walls an the sidewalks an the trees. People's clothes, even the fur on stray dogs an cats was all black from the smoke. An here too people knew my uncle. One of em invited us to eat. I got to feelin real gloomy. Uncle took a good hard look at me an then he spoke to me for the first time since we'd set out on the trip.

"Folks don't get old here," he said.

I dit'n understand. But I looked around at the people walkin by an he was right: they wat'n no old folks there. Uncle said "The smoke eats em away."

"Then why do they live here?" I wanted to ask, but couldn be bothered to try.

"Boats knows glass-workin too," Uncle said after a while. "From livin here."

I stood up with a jolt. My tongue was a big mess of knots but now I couldn hold back. Was I s'poseta live with a smoke-burpin clown like Boats in this town with some black awfulness spillin out over evythin? I had to ask this, no matter how long it took to get the question out. But Uncle motioned all calmin like for me to sit down beside im.

"Boats moved away a long time ago," he says.

A big wave of relief washed over me. As long as Boats don't live in this town, I said to myself, I'll be fine with im. Anywhere but here. Then Uncle says:

"He's in a dock town now." He pointed off the way we was headin. "Glassy Dock."

When I heard that name that gloomy feelin come back even worst. Uncle musta not realized I'd heard about Glassy Dock from folks come through his house visitin. Eveybody talked about it, so I knew it was the lonest dock on the Big Lake an a scary lady named Bibi owned the whole place. She'd been lovers with some really bad outlaw—or maybe he

was a rebel—and then he'd married er. In fack, somebody'd double-crossed im when he come to see er one time an he'd got killed by the govament people right there at the dock. But then thins went all topsy-turvy an somehow Bibi got the whole dock as her propity. She had a big ole boat anchored in the lake an that's where she lived. She had some kind of business she'd let folks come see her bout sometimes, but 'cep for that nobody was allowed to go there. Nobody was brave enough to even try. They was too scared of Bibi.

How did Boats end up livin in Glassy Dock? Was I gonna have to meet Bibi? Would she talk to me? Was she gonna ask questions an expect me to answer? Would she get mad an go crazy when she heard me talk? I was so lost in these questions inside me an imaginin the answers that I dit'n even notice we'd left the town with the glass factory. I was startled when Uncle said, "Here we are."

2

This must of been the most deserted area around all of Big Lake. They was a big empty plain an then the muddy water started an spread out so far you couldn see the other side. On our left they was a big boat pulled up to shore blockin the view a that part of the lake. Maybe it'd been used to carry logs. Now somebody'd took the logs an used em to build rooms on the deck, little ones an big ones, lots of em. The boards of the boat was all loose, an when they creaked it sounded like somethin big an huge breakin apart real slow. Down by the shore a big hunk of the dock was lyin on the ground. Near that was some things that looked like platforms with big cracks in em an a rotted board sunk into the mud till it was almost buried.

There wat'n much left, but I had the feelin it must of been a pretty busy place one time fore it went all to ruin. Folks called it a dock, but now it was just a couple or three posts in the water. They was a kind of roofed area that went from the wall of a buildin over to'rd the shore, an parta the roof hung over a pool a water where the lake had slopped over into a hole in the ground. The buildin it was attached to was a shapeless thin made outa logs an mud that looked like whoever was buildin it couldn decide whether to make a wood house or a mud house, an while they was tryin to make up ther mind, it just got done. The roof was all wood though, an stickin up from the middle was a little pink sail flappin in the wind.

I guess my uncle'd been here before. He grabbed my hand an walked fast down the slope an around under the overhang to the five steps that led up to the doorway.

There was Boats sittin on a chair smokin his tobacco. We went in an sat down too.

"Well here ya are," he said to Uncle an broke out coughin.

He seemed a lot older than I remembered for just eight years goin by. His eyes were so colorless an his lips were so dark they looked like they'd been matched up outa the wrong dye pots. He had this way of movin his head like he was ownin up to somethin. He was noddin like that when he saw me with those washed-out eyes an said, "He growed up!"

"It's been eight years," says Uncle.

We sat around for a long time without sayin anythin. I'd of thought they was usin hand signals or somethin, but they wat'n lookin at each other. All of a sudden my uncle stands up. I do too. Boats looks up at im an says "Won't ya set a spell?"

Uncle says, "I got a lot to do. Nothin's ready yet."

Boats nodded his head like he was agreein an my uncle went out the door. He got down the steps, then he turn around an come back an give me a big hug. We just hugged a long time an dit'n talk, an then he said "If you don't like it here, tell Boats. I'll come get you."

Boats moved his head that way of his, an Uncle went down the steps. I heard Boats cough an looked over his way. He took a few quick drags of his tobacco an then took my hand an walked out under the overhang. He just stood there all quiet runnin his eyes over the lake. Then he turned around like he was goin back in the house but he stops fore his foot hits the first step.

"Nah," he says. "Bibi first."

We walked along the lake shore till we came to the big boat. They was a couple a boards set up as a gangplank from the shore to the boat. We had to balance real careful to get to the other end, an then we clumb up the ladder onta the boat. The first room was small, with some rough cloth for a curtain over the doorway. There's this two-color cat sleepin outside that looks at us with its eyes half open. Boats stops. I stop too, a ways behind im. As soon as he coughs the curtain opens an out comes Bibi.

Seen er was scary, all right, but more'n scared I was just amazed: all I could think was how had this shapeless woman ever had somebody in love with er? She looks at Boats an then me.

"This your boy?"

“Just got here.”

Bibi looks me up an down a few times an then says:

“Looks sad.”

Boats dud’n say nothin. I don’t either. There’s a big stretch a quiet. I look at Bibi an she asks “Know how to swim?”

I shake my head no.

“Scared of the water?”

I nod, cause I am.

“Real scared?”

I nod yeah.

“You should be,” she says, like I just said somethin she’s been feelin inside.

I looked out at the big ole lake. The air was so still the muddy water looked like there wat’n no motion in it at all, you could have mistook it for a big flat field. I look up at Bibi an she’s still lookin at me. Then she turns to Boats an he gets out his pipe an matches an they smoke an talk for a long time, somethin about finances. A brown dog shows up an sniffs me, then it goes away. The cat wakes up an arches its back at the dog an then scats behind the curtain. I peek at Bibi from time to time. She was built strong. She seemed bigger than er boat, but it also seemed like she was fallin apart real slow just like the boat. At least that’s what popped into my head lookin at er an listenin to er, even though I couldn hear the words that good. All of a sudden she stops in the middle of what she’s sayin an yells “Faye!”

I hear a girl laughin, an the laugh sounds like it’s floatin on water. Boats takes my hand an leads me back to the gangplank. We climb down onto it an I hear Bibi’s voice behind my back sayin, “Take good care of im, Boats.” An then she says again “He looks sad.”

The way she said it I was startin to think maybe I was.

3

But I dit’n have no call to be sad. When we got back from Bibi’s an Boats showed me my room, I couldn even b’lieve it was parta the shapeless house on the dock out in the middle a nowheres, with the muddy ole lake in front an the empty field behind. Somebody’d really gone to a lot a trouble to make me comfy. It was big an decorated all over with thins made outa glass. They was glass set in the door an the walls, too. I was surprised Boats could make a place look like this. I thought he must of

had help, or maybe he'd learned how to do decoratin somewheres a long time ago. Some of the thins looked like they was just put there that day, an I guessed that maybe some other stuff had been took away, an maybe before me, a long time ago, somebody else had lived here.

Once I got showed my room, I figured I'd about seed all they was to see of Glassy Dock on my first day. But the second day I saw Faye.

I still can't b'lieve that as much as folks talked bout Glassy Dock when they came by my uncle's house, no one ever mentioned Bibi's daughter's name. I first heard it the day I got to Glassy Dock when Bibi called out to er. They was so much confusion that day I dit'n even think to wonder who Faye was. But the next mornin I heard somebody laughin. Then this voice says "Boats, let's see your boy."

Boats gets up an grabs my hand.

"Bibi's girl," he says as we go out under the overhang.

Bout twenty-five yards out there in the lake I see Faye, standin straight as can be at the far end of a little skinny boat that's rockin real slow from side to side. She gives a little curvy motion with er whole body an the boat starts movin to'rd the overhang. She does another little move like that an the boat comes closer. Gettin it along like that she pulls right up to us.

"This him?" she says an looks at Boats.

Now I was as surprised this girl was Bibi's daughter as I had been that Bibi could of ever been lovers with somebody. I tried to look at er close, an she was givin me the once-over from head to toe.

"He don't look sad," she says to Boats, an then she says to me, "You don't look sad."

"Who said I looked sad?" I wanteda shoot right back, kind of annoyed, but all I got out was a stutter. Faye laughs an says, "Boats, he... he's..."

Then she just busts out laughin harder an harder until Bibi's voice booms from er boat, "Faye, don't you bother him."

"Why," says Faye real loud, "cause he's sad?"

"Faye," says Boats like he's tryin to get er to like me, "you an him are gonna have a good time."

"Who needs a good time?" she says, an starts laughin again.

I'm startin to feel uneasy, trapped-like, but then she says "You seen your new aunt?"

Nope, I tell er by shakin my head.

"Don't you want to?"

I don't answer an look the other way.

"You don't want to?" she asks again.

So I move my head some way that might could mean yes or might could mean no. I start thinkin that my new aunt was s'posedta get to my old house today, maybe she was already there.

Uncle had said she'd go crazy if she heard me speak. I tried to pitcher myself talkin an her slowly goin crazy. I tried to imagine how you could live with a lady who'd go crazy on accounta me. An then I thought how this time yesterday I was at my old house, an it felt like years ago. In my mind I ran through the eight years I'd been there in eight seconds. I thought about my uncle huggin me before he left me with Boats, an more than ever I felt how he really loved me.

"Boats will really love you too." Faye's voice startled me.

I'd forgot all about er, but she'd been watchin me the whole time. Then, balancin real light, she walked to the other end of her boat. She give a little spin an her back was to'rd me. She did another one of those moves with her waist an the boat slowly slid away from us. I thought I'd seen a actual miracle.

"If I hadn't of heard Bibi callin er," I said to myself, "I'd of thought she was some kinda lake fairy."

Maybe not a fairy, but she was a miracle all right, because that girl had been born underwater an never set foot on dry land.

*

Bibi'd inherited er boat from somewhere back in er family, an no one could say how long it'd been there at Big Lake, Boats told me after Faye left. But Bibi useta live a ways back from the lake an er husband, the outlaw or whatever he was, he'd come see er in secret. When it was bout time for Faye to be born, the husband had sent Bibi to stay on the boat, along with a birthin woman. Boats was here, he could hear Bibi moanin when she went into labor. Then all of a sudden the voices changed. The govament people had showed up an was tryin to get Bibi to say where her husband was. Bibi wouldn't tell em, so they start holdin er underwater an lettin er up to get er to talk, an durin one of the long dunkins Faye got born.

"You could see bubbles comin from Bibi under the water," Boats told me, "an then in the middle of the bubbles up pops Faye's little head an she starts to cry."

Now the govament people realized Bibi wat'n fakin. They went away, but they kep a watch on er, an sure nough, one day Faye's papa come down to the dock just like they thought he would. They surrounded the boat, an when he tried to escape he got hurt an fell in the water an drowned.

Ever since, Bibi an Faye lived right there on the boat. Bibi sometimes went somewheres on land, but she never let Faye come ashore. She'd roam around the lake in that little boat a hers or go back to er mama on the big boat. But nobody knew why. Was it some kinda vow Bibi'd took? Had she done a pact or somethin? Nobody knew how long Faye was gonna be goin around in circles in that lake, or if her feet was ever gonna touch the groun.

4

I was at Glassy Dock a year an saw all the seasons go by, an whatever season it was, there was Faye's boat roamin all over the lake. She was the only thin was any kind a fun for me. The door to my room let onto the big empty field, an past that all they was was fishin villages an then that smoky awful place with the glass fact'ry. I dit'n go to these places cause they was always dryin fish, an the fishermen was busy doin ther work an dit'n have no use for me, an I dit'n have no use for them neither. They was a bunch a other dock places on the lake, even some pretty big fishin towns. One or two of em was even kinda fun, with lotsa stuff goin on in town, but after I went to em a coupla times I saw how it was: evybody'd heard bout Boats's boy, an they'd soon enough figure out that was me.

So excep for roamin around the empty field where maybe I'd find somethin now an then to play with, I mostly set around under the overhang. Boats would come here too after he got all his errands an runnin around done, an tell me stories that would of been good to remember, but I forgot em anyhow. The part I remember is how if I wat'n listenin too good cause the story was kinda borin, he'd get all upset an start actin it out the way he useta do his acts, an then he'd bring on one of his coughin fits an spoil it even worst.

At first I thought Glassy Dock was at the ends a the earth, an it must of always been this lonesome up this part of the lake. That wat'n true, but it *was* true that nobody could come here without Bibi's say-so. That's what the folks had said at my uncle's house, an I figured she never did let anybody come around. But after I was at Boats's awhile I noticed they

was special days when the fishermen came here an brought ther boats an nets. In fact sometimes they was so many of em it looked like a little fair set up right on the water. I'd sit under the overhang an listen to the fishermen shoutin directions to each other an whatnot. Ever now an then in between the voices you'd hear Faye laughin. Sometimes they sounded like they was tellin Faye don't do somethin, or you'd hear some old fisherman who'd be scoldin er, but he's laughin out loud at the same time. Then Bibi's voice would yell "Faye, let em work!"

Faye'd just laugh, an the fisherman would tell Bibi to let er be.

Most days Faye would come down to the dock early in the mornin. She'd pull er boat up to the overhang an talk to Boats for a while an then she'd call me out, an if Boats went away she'd talk to me. Her talk was kinda like a little kid's. It was all stories bout er dog an cat an why Bibi got mad at er the day before. Sometimes she'd ask me a question so sudden I'd start to answer with my tongue stead of waggin my head. She'd laugh like crazy an get another scoldin from Bibi, an then she'd push off away out to the other end of the lake. Afternoons Bibi'd yell for her loud an you'd see er little boat pull in to er mama's. Then you'd hear Faye laughin an Bibi gettin mad. Later in the day, off she'd go again an pull up to the dock. If Boats wat'n there she'd talk to me about im. She laughed at evythin to do with Boats, from his tobacco-smokin to the clothes he wore to the sail on toppa the house.

One day she's talkin to me an I start to suspeck, in fack pretty soon I'm sure of it, that this girl never seen Boats do his acts he done years ago, in fact she dud'n even know bout em. So I try to talk, real calm, cause I wanta tell er bout what Boats useta do. I try an I try. She listens real nice, give me all er tention, dud'n laugh, just like Uncle had started to do right at the end. Just then out comes Boats smokin his tobacco. He helps me out by tellin Faye what I been tryin to say. He even does two or three of his acts for er, the short ones. They wat'n nowheres near as good as what he useta do, but Faye she laughs till er boat's bout ready to turn over an wants more, but by now Boats has got hisself coughin again. Faye waits for im to stop coughin, but he's wavin er go away. So she's still laughin an turns er boat around an as she's sailin off she says, "Boats, Boats, you'd even make Bibi laugh."

Next mornin she shows up earlier'n usual, but Boats is aready gone somewheres. She starts talkin to me bout what he done the day before, an describin his acts like I hat'n a been there, or like I never knowed about em. I listened to er awhile an then I tried to tell er heck Boats useta tie a

sail on his back at fairs an pretend he was a sinkin ship, with big crowds watchin an all. I couldn do it, either with my mouth or tryin to say it with my hands. So I gave up.

“Tomorrow,” I said inside me, “I’m gonna tell you. Somehow.”

I watched er move on outa sight.

“Tomorrow,” I said again inside. “Somehow.”

My uncle showed up at the dock that same night.

In one year he looked like he aged more than Boats had done the whole eight years before I’d got there. He was walkin shaky an Boats was holdin im up, practically carryin im. As soon as he sees me he grabs me in his arms. Finally Boats pulls im offa me an makes im sit down proper. Then he turns to me.

“Your new auntie’s died,” he tells me, an the cough starts sawin on im again.

5

My uncle an I dit’n say a word to each other. Right after he got there Boats took im away somewheres an come back alone real late at night. It was just after I’d laid down to go to sleep. I guess Boats smoked some tobacco an then he fell asleep too. I couldn stop wonderin how Uncle had got so old so fast. Then I thought about my new auntie that died before she ever even seen me, an maybe never went crazy too. Then I started recollectin that year at Glassy Dock. How first I’d been bored by the quiet, quiet like nothin could make a dent in it, but how now it felt full of noises. Sounds you could hear from the glass-factory town, voices from over to the fishin docks, water birds hootin out on the lake. I just hat’n been payin attention. But now all I had to do was prick up my ears a little an I could hear the waves comin in almost like they dit’n really want to an turn back oncet they got to shore, an I’d pick up the planks in Bibi’s boat creakin real low.

I decided out of anywhere in the world Glassy Dock was the place for me, an I was born to be at Glassy Dock.

“Tomorrow mornin, I’m tellin Boats,” I said to myself, an fell asleep.

In the mornin my eyes opened like every mornin to the sound of Boats coughin. Then come Faye’s voice. They was talkin like always but Boats was inside so he had to speak loudly an kep breakin down in fits a

coughin.

I got up an went out to the overhang an there was Faye standin in the middle of er boat. She an Boats couldn see each other but they talked a little more. Part of it was about Bibi. Then Faye goes back to the other end of her boat. The boat makes a half-circle from the movement of er feet an now er back's to me. For the first time I took a really good look at Bibi's girl an was more amazed than ever that that lady could be her mama.

Right then Faye's body shimmies an the boat moves away from the dock. Then it slows up an stops again. Faye looks out over the big ole lake. Her boat rocks real gentle an she steadies it her way. She makes a little move with er feet you can barely even see an the boat does another half-circle. Now I'm really gettin a good look at er. I'm even afraid she's not gonna like me lookin at er this way, but she ain't takin no notice a me. She stares at the water like it's the first time she ever seen it. Then with real careful steps she walks to the end a the boat nearest me. She leans over an takes another long look at the water, shakes er whole body into position an then real calm she puts one foot down on toppa the water just like you was steppin on dry land. Then she moves er other foot off the boat an takes another step. An then another one.

"She's walkin on the water!" I was yellin inside myself, cause I was a whole lot surprised an a little bit scared. I looked over at Boats, who I could see through the doorway smokin his tobacco in the house, an then back to the lake. There was the shore, an Faye's empty boat, an in between they wat'n nothin but water an a bunch a ripples spreadin out from the middle. In a second Faye's head come up in the circles. She starts smackin the water with er hands like she was tryin a grab onto the surface of the lake. The water splashed an Boats calls out, "Faye, stop foolin around with the water."

Then the smoke gets im like a noose around his neck an he doubles over coughin like mad. I look back at im a second. This one's a real fit, an he needs help. I look back at the lake. All I see is circles on empty water.

She comes up again an then sinks. I look er right in the eye an jump up with a jolt.

"Boats!" I screamed, my tongue startin to stumble.

I leapt to'rd im. His coughin let up, but he was wheezin an rubbin his chest with one hand an his eyes with the other one. I dashed up the steps an grabbed both his hands an shook im hard.

"...Faye..." was all that come outa my mouth.

Those pale eyes looked into mine, an then lightnin flashed in his face

an I felt like a hawk had ripped out of my grasp. Dust was risin off the steps down to the overhang an Boats was standin at the shore.

Faye's boat came round a whole circle. Boats looks at it an then at the water. Then he lets out a yell at the top of his lungs in some language I never heard before. Bibi gives the same call from her boat. It comes back from way across the lake. Then Bibi yells over "Sad-Eyes?"

"Faye!" Boats yells so loud the water in front of im starts wobblin.

Other voices started yellin what Boats had yelled an fishermen come runnin to'rd the dock from all over, some of em bringin ther nets an some empty-handed. Even fore they got to the overhang some of em jumped in the water an Boats was signalin where to go when I heard a splash. The dog was barkin an runnin helter-skelter on the big boat an the two-color cat had its back all raised up lookin at the dog from up on the roof. Then here comes Bibi with practic'ly nothin on cuttin through the water like some scarred-up ole man-eatin fish. Her body smacks into Faye's boat an sends it spinnin like a top. She dives an comes up on the other side a the boat. She signals to the fishermen an dives down again.

Folks from other docks was rowin over to Glassy Dock now; some of em aready overboard an swimmin in front a ther boats.

Now heads were bobbin evywhere in the water between the overhang an Faye's boat. A crowd started collectin along the shore too. It was all ruckus an confusion with evybody talkin at once so's you couldn tell who was sayin what, an loudest of all was the splashin water, so noisy you couldn tell if time was even passin. Finally this one voice booms out over evythin. The clatter dies to nothin. The bodies in the water swim over without makin any sound till slowly they all gather at one spot. Now nobody says a word, the only sound is that dog barkin on the boat. All of a sudden I feel my hand clamped like in a vise, an there's Boats.

"Beat it," he says givin my hand a little shake.

I dit'n understand. Then he pulls me inside the house. I was screwin my neck around to look back at the lake but Boats tugs my hand an turns me to look at im. His eyes are like they're burnin into my face. "Git goin," he says.

He got me to the back door an opened it. There was that big flat empty plain. "They found er," he says to me, an then he points off across the field an says real fast, "You can get to the glass town pretty quick. You can find some way to get outa here from there. Or if you don't, just say the name Boats to anybody an they'll help you."

He stuffed some money tied up in a rag into my pocket. I wanteda ask im so many things an I dit'n wanta leave, but then he says "You're the

only one saw er drown. Evybody's gonna wanta know about it. Bibi more'n anybody. You gonna be able to answer?"

I saw how it'd be: people makin a ring around me—fishermen an hired hands an people just passin through—a thick crowd, questions flyin evywhere, Bibi starin at me with those hot eyes. Evybody shuts up an she walks up to me...

Boats sees me shakin an says, "Tell me how it happened ...anythin you can...Did she fall in the water?"

"...No..." I somehow managed.

"Well what, then? She jump?"

"No," I said, an shook my head both.

"Boats shook me: "Come on, say somethin, hurry up!"

I knew my tongue wat'n gonna work so I tried to tell im with my hands. But they kep stoppin an pullin back an I felt like even my hand-talk was stutterin, an nobody could make that out neither. But Boats asks me all choked up, "She was walkin on the water?"

"Yes," I got out.

"And she went under?"

"Yes."

"Was she headin to'rd er ma's boat?"

"No."

"Which way then? Was she comin to'rd us?" he says.

I said yes with my head.

Boats put his head down an looked like he got a little older right there in front of me.

Finally he says "I been lookin at that girl evy day, from the time that little head busted outa the water"—he was practically coughin the words now—"and never did notice how grewed-up she'd started to look."

I just stayed quiet an looked at im, an he got even older.

"Okay, git goin" he says with his hand on my shoulder. "I'll thinka somethin to tell em. Don't you be tellin nobody nothin."

Now how would I do that? I was thinkin. Then my eyes went back to the dock. Boats turns me around real gentle an give me a little nudge to'rd the open field.

When I got to the edge of it I turned back a moment an he said, "Your uncle was comin to take you back yesterday. I tole im wait a few days."

He coughed lightly again. Then he starts to go back in an shut the door behind im.

Before it was closed my big trip felt like it aready begun, but after

maybe fifteen steps he calls out to me. I turned around an he come walkin over to me, almost limp, lookin like he's doin a act of a ship with its sails tore off in the wind. He come up an gimme a big hug. He lets go an steps back a pace.

Then Bibi wails from the dock, "Boats!"

That ole clown looks at me one last time with those colorless eyes. He nods like he's sayin yes to somethin, an I turn around an walk. □

—*Version by Elizabeth Bell*