

He woke up with a scream, breathing heavily as he clutched his chest in a cold sweat. He knew he had a nightmare but he couldn't remember what it was about. Looking around finding sacs of flesh no better than dolls bobbing up and down the broken wing like rotten fruit. After he spent hours looking for survivors he cried himself to sleep. When he awoke to the same scene it all but confirmed his situation. The young man of 14 was stranded at sea, he was tired, he was sad and worst of all he was all alone.

Jason was lying on the wing of the aircraft staring up at the sky hoping, praying as he waited for someone, anyone, hell anything to save him. He got up from time to time and found snack bags floating near the wing, the snacks that were scattered from the crash and disconnected from the plane's body that had sunk to the bottom of the ocean while Jason looked for survivors. Jason didn't have an appetite; he knew that he had to eat that he had to do something to survive but he just couldn't bring himself to move with the horrific scene still so fresh in his mind. He was terrified of the dolls he called them in the water. So he waited an hour and turned to 6 then to a day and a day turned to two.

If anyone saw the scene they would mistake Jason for one of the corpses that surrounded him but he was alive and something knew that too.

As Jason was contemplating his life he heard a sound not the crashing of the waves on the wing however it was something different and more pronounced. He listlessly turned his head to look as he saw a puzzling scene: a fish as white as snow with

eyes to match was poking its head out the water watching him. While weird Jason didn't think much of it until it opened its mouth.

"Are you going to eat those crackers? Heheheh!"

Jason eyes grew wide, he tried to get up, moving his arms and legs as if alien to his body he slipped as he quickly regained his balance and attempted to stand he attempted to speak but his mouth was like a desert so all that he could force out was a raspy whisper,

"wh...at?"

The fish opened its mouth in shock as if it saw an impossibility.

"You're not de...dead?"

The fish screamed as it retreated back into the ocean. Jason sat there in contemplation. 'Did I just talk to a fish?' As he looked around a new fear suddenly occurred to him and took root in his heart the fear of his own death as that feeling washed over him he felt hungry, starving like there was a void inside him threatening to swallow him whole. So he turned the few chips he had and devoured them. No longer in fear of the corpses but in the all consuming threat of starvation he plunged into the water in search of more. Grabbing them off the surface of the water and ripping them open to feast. After about an hour he had eaten about 20 bags of the 50 he had found and placed the rest on the wing. Jason made an effort not to starve but

straining his body like that after acting like a doll for 2 days was not the best idea in the world and so after satisfying his desires his head slumped forward and his consciousness faded.

Jason's eyes opened to the sight of what looked like a fish with paper scales once again only this time the fish was smiling and he wasn't staring at him but his mountain of snacks. The fish's expression changed when he noticed the boy's eyes open. He looked displeased. And then scurried off again as Jason's body shot up from the ground.

After becoming fully lucid Jason was wondering if he had just imagined the fish and so he had a theory he wished to test. Reluctantly he opened one of the bags and threw it into the water, finally convinced that he was crazy. Jason turned away only to hear the slight bubbling behind him. The fish had popped out and started devouring the pretzels. After the white fish finished every single pretzel did it look up and open its mouth.

"You really know how to grab someone's attention!"

Jason stared at the fish in awe until he finally said

"What are you?"

"Well clearly I'm a fish. The real enigma is you and this thing that you're sitting on kid. So you got a name or what?"

‘IM REALLY TALKING TO A FISH????’

“J-Jason”

“Archie, I would say nice to meet you but I have no clue what you are?”

‘The fish has a name, does it have some sort of civilization?’

“I-I’m a human. Have you never seen one?”

“Well whatever you are you sure are lucky you survived something all of your other kind died. What’s more you survived eating that much after starving yourself like that.”

‘If there is a civilization like that and it hasn’t seen us even though we are so abundant, wait, am I on another planet?’

“Hey kid, Kid you listening?”

Feeling his heart sink deeper he pushed that theory aside and-

“Huh? Oh yeah sorry what did you say?”

“Uhh. Nevermind. You got a plan, kid? Cause to me it looks like your a ways away from home.”

Jason looked down at the water solemnly.

"Well I'm sure someone is going to come rescue me at some point. I just have to be patient? To that end could I use your help Archie?"

The fish looked at him with a contemplative gaze

"You want me to help you survive?"

"Well that and maybe stay with me?"

"Look kid I have things I got to do too I can't just stay he-"

The fish glanced at Jason who was on the cusp of tears and sighed.

"Sure kid I can hang around from time to time"

After learning he was no longer alone Jason was now reinvigorated with the need to go back home. Jason began spending his days diving into the sea trying to find anything that seemed useful from the plane crash. Grabbing the parachute he had and building a little shelter for himself. He began diving for rations as even though he wasn't the best swimmer he was confident he wouldn't drown. And every day just as he promised the fish came to keep the boy company. When the fish learned of Jason's diving exploits he told him just 1 thing.

"Whatever you do, don't get too close to that plane."

"How would I even go that deep man I'm not trying to drown!"

“Hah you’re right then forget I said anything.”

A month would pass just like that while Jason would notice that 1 of the dolls he named Jeffery was missing. A new thing he did to spend his time was speak to the dolls while the fish wasn't there. But when he was Jason and the fish would talk for sometimes hours at a time. They would discuss simple things or more like Jason would chat and the fish would listen. The boy would mention his daily life, his school and his friends. After some time the fish began sharing his own stories. He would talk about his home and how empty he found it, his life, and how he's always away from it all because of work. He talked about the world, the paradise that is under the sea.

“The place is beautiful kid I’ll tell ya! I don’t know what passes for entertainment where your from but the world down there, let’s just say there are plenty of fish in the sea. Or I guess rive—”

The fish eyes grew wide like he just committed a taboo.

“River? This isn’t an ocean?”

“Kid forget what you just heard.”

“What no way Archie this might be a lead on how I can get out of this place can you tell me more-”

“KID I SAID TO CAN IT!!”

Jason recoiled in fear as the fish stared into the depths of the river

“Look kid, I'm sorry, just... drop it.”

The fish looked up with a determined gaze and asked

“Hey kid this might not be the best time, have you noticed that the corps—I mean dolls have been going missing?”

“Missing?”

In that moment Jason felt a ripple in his heart as if something dark began to move to grab hold of his mind he knew something was off Jeffery, Deborah, Cassie they all went missing throughout the months but he was afraid of admitting what he was almost certain of.

‘He's confirmed that something has to have been dragging down the corpses?’ ‘Has it been here the whole time’ ‘No there is nothing else here, not a single other living creature for miles... so it could only be’

“Archie?”

“Huh yeah kid?”

“Why did you tell me not to approach the plane?”

“Oh that's... because it's so deep you'll drown remember you said it yourself.”

“No Archie, what's the real reason!”

Archie paused for a moment staring at Jason just like the first time they met and said-

“Because the way out is down there.”

Those words were electrifying, invigorating, but they ignited just as much anger and confusion as it did hope

“Do you expect me to believe that? Whatever is down there can't be good, heck you could be the one dragging the dolls to the bottom for it to eat. You just so confusing sometimes I think your my best friend and then you give me these mixed signals like you want me dead. Is that why there is nothing else here cause it fed on everything? And left you alive to do its bidding? Am I just livestock to you?”

The fish watched the boy in silence waiting for the boy to let out all his ideas and frustrations until it responded.

“Your answers are waiting at the bottom. Your fate is there as well.”

And then the fish left diving back into the river hidden behind the dark waves

“Fine I’ll just survive without you hell I’ll thrive! And don’t ever come back, monster!”

The following months went by in a blur and as he continued to observe his surroundings he was slowly being proven more and more right. The dolls were disappearing and at an alarming rate. Jason guessed that once they were all gone the fish would have nothing to feed the monster but him.

‘Guess he doesn’t need to hide the monster he is feeding! But sadly for him I won’t be here for much longer’

After the conversation with the fish he began to build a raft, a vast and mighty vessel that could take him through the seas using his parachute he created the sail of the vessel and cut out a piece of the wing as the boat. During his free time he would talk to Justin the doll that he brought from the depths of this horrid river. Finally he was ready to go. There were only a few dolls left in the water. He didn’t have a lot of time before the fish would come for him.

With a satisfied smile he pushed off the wing of the ship and finally left the life he knew for so many months.

He sailed through the currentless river with only a slight breeze to move him. The boy sailed for an entire day making sure to keep track of his direction. However after many hours of looking over his shoulder Jason was tired his body craved rest and so he slumped down on the vessel to fall asleep.

When the boy awoke he couldn't believe his eyes as he was right next to the planes wing. Right back where he started the fishes voice snarled in the back of his mind.

'Your fate is waiting there too. Go there Jason we both know you can't escape fate.'

Gritting his teeth Jason counted the number of dolls left in the water

"Five Left"

Then with new found resolve Jason voyaged once again stating awake an extra day but to no avail for as he awoke he was back at the beginning.

"Four"

He tried to paddle out of the wing to go faster, farther.

"Three"

He left the snacks on the wing for less weight on the journey.

"Two"

He stayed awake for five full days dunking his head in the water until he finally saw something inconceivable. A fog so vast and thick it was as if the world was a canvas and he found the end of the art. Jason began to brave the fog for hours until he

broke through into a new light. An eerily familiar light the light of the planes wing and the final doll laying in the water.

Jason was defeated; he had lost every ounce of strength and fell off the boat. It was cold but that was nothing new to him. He was as empty as the day he first opened his eyes here. He sank deeper and deeper into the depths of the river, he had not the energy nor the will to resist fate. After what felt like hours he finally made it to the bottom of the river where the plane sat alone. Empty. He was the only one there alone, like the space was made for him and a lone fish.

The fish approached him and told him that he was right there is no way to escape fate.

“So what are you going to feed me to your master?”

The fish chuckled, asking if you really believed that.

“N-no, its just.”

The fish said to let him show you. As he pushed the boy with surprising strength for such a small fish. He pushed the boy into the cabin of the plane to a lone doll. A doll in the shape of a young boy of 14. The fish which took the form of a pale young man no older than 30. He spoke softly explaining to the child that he was already stabbed through the chest by a stray metal wire he bled out. He explained to the child that he was waiting for you to remember but he became a little greedy after having a companion after millennia. He apologized for lying to the boy for keeping the boy from his family—

“Archie...Thank you for being my friend”

On the verge of tears Archie stared at the boy and stifled a

“Thank you... thank you for filling this empty home of mine.”

As the tears of the pale man filled the ocean the boy slowly started to fall lower than plane lower than the ocean to the utopia beyond.