

The Invaders

It was as dark as the moon was bright, yet somewhere amidst the shadows I could detect slight movement. Everyone was at camp, even my father, Nullah, who usually crept along the sandy surface of the beach, catching unsuspecting fish from the triumphant blue, crystal clear shore. I slowly closed my eyes, listening for the roar of the wind and the crashing of the waves, but tonight something was definitely disturbing nature's noises. I dipped a nearby stick in the flames of the campfire until it was burning hot and slowly sneaked out of camp, holding it in front of me as if it were a weapon. I could hear shallow breathing, perhaps it was the occasional dugong washed ashore but it sounded different, almost human-like. Casting the light of my torch onto the ground I could see patches of deep red seeping through the sand. I followed the trails until I reached what I was looking for.

It was two bodies. They were beaten and slashed like fish killed for meat, barely stirring, and collapsed onto the beach. Shredded logs and planks surrounded them, plunged into the sand. I shone my torch onto their faces and saw that their skin was as white as a ghost. I stepped back. My elders had told me stories about how these "ghosts" had murdered tribes of our people, ruined our land with exotic plants and weeds and brought merciless animals that killed our own. Yet, here they were, bleeding to death on our land and I had to help them. I scampered back to camp until I found my father and heavily shook him.

"Ngarra, what is it?" Father worryingly whispered in traditional Eora tongue.

"Come, you have to see this, people, ghosts, they are here on our beach!" I hastily replied.

Standing up hurriedly, father grabbed his spears and followed me along the sandy path where the two bloody bodies were lying.

"Here" I breathed "What are we going to do?"

Father examined the bodies, I had no idea what he was thinking.

I could see worry shining in his eyes as he turned to face me, crouching down with his hands on my shoulders. "Ngarra, go warn everyone else at camp and tell them to come here, they must know" he apprehensively instructed me.

"What are we going to do father?" I questioned him nervously.

"You don't need to know," he assured me "Just bring all the adults here and we will sort this out ourselves."

I was so perplexed and curious that I argued back. "But father I need to know otherwise what am I going to tell everybody at ca--"

"Just go!" he ordered me, I was shocked at the power in his voice. "There is no time for arguments, bring the everyone here now, you don't understand how dire the situation is."

With one last look at father as he rammed his spear deep into the sand near the bodies' heads, I dashed into the forest as fast as I could. The Sun was slowly awakening now and the blood red sky was bleeding into the darkness like the blood of the two bodies into the sand.

As I sprinted back I could hear loud voices and when I arrived at camp everyone was awake.

"Can I please have everyone's attention" I said, trying to speak over the loud morning chatter "My father has requested that everyone go down to the beach to sort out a matter with a few foreigners."

Several heads had turned in my direction but most people hadn't heard me because of other loud voices, although my great-grandmother had.

"Everyone please quieten down" she ordered and silence fell. Elders are held in great esteem in Aboriginal culture and are therefore listened to and respected. "It seems that my great-grandson has a message." I repeated what I said before to gasps of shock and screams of horror but once again, my great-grandmother intervened.

"If my grandson has requested we go to the beach, then we must but we also must stay calm and be cautious even if we are threatened by these foreign people," she instructed.

At this several people nodded and everyone calmed down. Older men and women grabbed spears, clubs, shields and boomerangs, prepared for a fight if one began. Younger parents stayed back with their children but were ready to come to the beach if needed. I rummaged through my belongings until I found my small, self-made spear and sharpened the tip that was recently dented by a large possum, against a rock. I watched as the adults marched towards the beach and sneakily followed behind them. As we all approached I saw my father, kneeling, a look of deep surprise and utter confusion spread across his face as he eyed the weapons in all our hands.

"Weaponry is not necessary. They are injured children who are in urgent need of our help," my dad announced, getting to his feet, as people started lowering their spears and clubs.

"But they are not welcome here. Children or not, they are still white and you know, Nullah, just how harmful white people can be to us" a man boldly yelled.

"We must not be prejudiced, instead we will take them in and treat them well. Women please go crush up some paper bark to make tea-tree oil so we can treat their wounds. Men please collect leaves and wood to create a stretcher so we can carry them to our camp," father directed.

Everyone did as told and soon father was tenderly applying the oil onto the boys' injuries while grandmother brewed some of it to create a sort of tea that acted like a medicine for throat ailment. After this the men came back with a hard wooden stretcher and carried them back to camp where they woke up.

Instantly they started babbling in a strange foreign language, looking distressed and worried. None of us could understand them. One of the boys, who had silky fawn hair and light brown eyes, was staring avidly around while the other, who was very pale with thick blonde hair and cold grey eyes, looked forbidding.

"Where is the Captain? Where is our boat? Who are these weird people around us?" the pale boy rambled on.

"I am not sure Marcel but I think it'll be alright. These people seem like they are going to help us," the other boy assured him calmly.

"Help us? Xander, are you mad? These people are sure going to attack us. Besides, we need to get back to our boat or else the Captain is going to whip us raw!" Marcel fiercely and hysterically replied and tried to get up again after being pushed back by mother.

"Father, what are we going to do?" I asked him inquiringly "We can't even understand them!"

"Don't worry Nullah, I know a bit of their language, a white soldier came here before and taught me. This is why I am helping these boys, we need to give them a chance, not all white people are horrible," he answered.

"Boys, we only want to help," he guaranteed and they stopped babbling to stare at him. "You can live with us, it is okay."

A night had passed since these strangers had appeared on our land and they seemed to be settling in alright. One of the boys, who father found out was named Xander, was even willing to help us but the other boy, Marcel, was still not that convinced that we were trying to help him and strangely started muttering to himself randomly but at least he was still not hostile towards us. When the Sun started setting again we taught them our practises so they could survive in the wild, teaching them how to make weapons, tools and shelter and even how to hunt. They were mostly well behaved and followed our rules at all times so soon we started accepting them as our own, the only problem being the language barrier. People always called father when conversing with the boys so he had to act as a translator, doing his new job by understanding most of their simple phrases and replying back. All went surprisingly well and even Marcel was happy to help after a while until one day when disaster struck.

A boat docked at our bay, not the usual fishing boat or canoe but a large sailing ship, its masts and sails swaying in the wind. White men were standing on top of it, their chests puffed out and their faces unreadable.

"Xander, Marcel, how dare you, this will add to your sentences this will, oh yes, finally we have found them and justice will be served," one of the men snarled evilly, his face suddenly twisted with triumph and anger. Xander and Marcel stared at him, horrified and scared. The men aboard the ship marched down and grabbed them to screams and protests from our crowd.

"SILENCE!" the men yelled and silence fell "These boys are convicts. They are criminals I tell you. That's right. So unless you want to be punished as well, I suggest that you keep quiet so justice can be served." Father, as the only person who understood him asked him "Why are they criminals? What have they done? They don't deserve this, they are well behaved boys. You tell me now how they ended up on our island and what they did."

His face contorted with rage, the man turned to face father " So you want to know hey. Fine I'll tell you. These boys, they stole from shops, stole bread they did, so they could stuff their greedy faces full! And how they ended on your island, the ship they were on crashed nearby and they were swept here. You know enough now, they are going to serve the sentences they deserve!"

With that, we all sadly watched and waved goodbye as the boys went aboard the ships and left us after months of friendship...