



ACT TWO. SCENE ONE.

For Moss, storms had a smell: churned-up salt water and seaweed, damp wood on the tide, even the far-off burn of lightning . . . but this storm had something else. It was sweeter. *Wilder*. Moss pushed her hair sideways and looked up at the cliffs. Tiny pieces of colour were everywhere, as if the rocks held gemstones. She growled as her hair flew back in front of her face, tangling in a hundred different sailor's knots.

But she'd seen right.

Stormflowers.

Opening.

Again, she shoved her hair clear to see where the flowers grew thickest, all around Pa's cave. Wind was pulling their petals, rattling their stems. The storm's sweetness was *this*. There were pink ones, white, others gold – petals floated from the rocks to settle on her shoulders. She heard a high-pitched singing sort of sound too. Pa'd always said the flowers would sing. When they wanted to. When they were ready to open full.

She tried to see Pa at the cave entrance. *Now* she knew why he wasn't down on the beach with her, exploring for wash-up. He was

doing this. Somehow he'd opened the flowers, made them work!

She dropped the collecting pot and ran. Fast, fast, faster, leaping the sharp stones on that part of the beach. Quick, quicker, she skidded through their camp, then took the well-used path up to the cave. She was huff-puffing before she was even halfway. As she spread her arms wide so that she was almost touching the wild-moving pine trees, she was imagining how, later, beside the campfire, Pa would dance and sing and swirl her. Would tell stories 'til the fire went low, of the world where they had come from, of where they would go back to, also, one day. His smile would be broad beneath his bird-beak nose, his blue-grey eyes soft.

Now she felt lighter. Now she ran faster. She went quick-spinning and leaping beneath those petals, all swirling and falling. Until, flinching, she saw the sky smash.

'Lightning,' she whispered, savouring the word like a treasure. 'Sky's on fire.'

Was what Pa would say. She spread her arms wide 'til her wrists brushed pine needles and felt their cool zing.

Sky's!

On!

Fire!

She loved Pa's sayings and how his voice tilted as he spoke them; she liked to test how they felt in her mouth. A bigger, second flash came, but she didn't lie flat on the ground like Pa had taught her and wait for it to pass. She stood still, feeling the wind claw, smelling the petals, hearing the sea moan above the reef. And, still, that singing – that high-pitched, sweet-pretty singing! From beyond the volcano, at very toppest of the island, she thought she heard the wild dogs howl in answer. Perhaps even the lizards hissed

in their caves. Today, everything on the island cried out.

At Pa's cave, the heavy cloth across the door was half pulled back. Inside, the wind was not so firm. When Pa turned, his teeth caught the light from the candles and glinted like the petals did. He held out his arms and she ran for them.

'How did you make the flowers full-open, Pa?'

'Luck?' He shrugged, smiling. 'Maybe it was just the right time.'

She breathed in, there was smoke and earth, the smells always in Pa's coverings no matter how hard Pa washed at them. She crouched to Jess too, and breathed in running and rabbits. The dog licked her ear. Pa took Moss's hand and pulled her to the table to see the glass vase. She reached to touch it, thinking, as always, how special it was that something so fragile had survived their rough journey across the sea so long ago. Underneath its lid, a mixture swirled.

'Opened petals?' she asked. 'All crushed up?'

Pa nodded. 'Mixed them with salt water and sand. I told them dreams and stories! When they'd had enough, they opened.'

'Island feeds on stories.' She repeated the words he'd told her once when he'd been crouched close to the fire.

'Clever Moss.' He tapped her on the nose. 'I found those ones on the volcano. I sang for them. Perhaps I got the song right; perhaps they were just ready.'

He winked, then hummed for Moss. It sounded more like a bird's song than the rowdy-loud sailing songs Pa sang beside the fire after palm wine. Two notes, up and down, getting faster and higher in pitch until it was like a finch's trill. He put the flowers he'd picked on the table, in a line. Before, when the island had storms, the flowers had only opened a little, and she and Pa had peered

inside the closed-up petals to see their yellow hearts. But today their centres shone, and their petals glinted vivid-bright as fish scales.

'When I felt this storm coming,' Pa continued, 'I knew the flowers would open – I felt it core-deep! Now we can send them out to the world.'

'Heal the floods,' Moss murmured, repeating other words she'd read in his book.

'Fix the darkness,' he added.

'Then we'll go back there, yes?'

Pa didn't hear her words. Instead, gentle-slow, Pa picked up one of the smallest, most orange flowers and held it out. Glow-bright, it was.

'The pollen,' Pa explained, 'making it glint.'

But she knew that; Pa had told her a thousand times.

Healing pollen.

Magic pollen.

Pollen to change the world and make it safe again.

Pollen to heal Pa, too.

When she breathed in, the pollen's sweet smell tickled the back of her throat.

'Try it now, Pa,' Moss said. 'See if it heals anything! See if your brain feels better!'

He ruffled her hair, got fingers caught in it. Carefully, he took the flower between finger and thumb. Snapping the flower's head from the stem, he put it inside his mouth. His eyes widened, and he chewed.

Moss squinted as she watched him, waited for his Adam's apple to bob down his swallow. Did Pa look any different? Could one

flower make him better?

Pa laughed at her expression. 'Do you want to try?'

She took a pink flower. Closer up, its smell was sweeter than the honeycomb she fetched from the hives. It wriggled in her fingers and felt almost . . . alive. There was a sound like giggling. Was it coming from the flower?

'We can't eat something that laughs!'

Pa's eyes went crinkle-kind. 'Sing to it. Let it know you mean well.'

She copied him – those two bird-trill notes – moving her mouth in the same way he did. Jess barked. The flower went still in her hand, almost as if it were listening too. She turned it this way and that, seeing its million shades of pink.

'It's too beautiful,' she said. 'It giggled!'

'So? You giggle too! What six-year-old wouldn't when I do *this* . . .' He reached forward to tickle her ribs and she squirmed away, giggling louder than the flower. She wanted to spin and spin with the whooshing feeling inside.

When she opened her palm and looked back at it proper, it seemed to buzz on her skin. Something felt different inside her as she watched it, like her pulse beat faster and stronger.

'Like magic,' she whispered.

'It likes your stories,' Pa said. 'It gets energy from them, wants to be inside you to see them better.'

She laughed again, and the flower seemed to move – just a little – towards her.

'See?' Pa said.

Quick-fast, she put it in her mouth. Chewed. Got an explosion of sweetness on her tongue. It made her teeth tingle. Made her

want to laugh and laugh and spin and swirl. Made her want to sit beside the fire and tell stories with Pa, read from his book. Draw pictures with sticks, dance in spirals. Pa had been right: These flowers were full-magic. Now she felt full-magic too.

Pa tipped rock-pool water from a scallop shell on to the table. 'Watch this, Moss.'

On a breeze from outside, the flowers moved towards the water, their petals darkening as they soaked it in.

'They drink it?'

Pa nodded. 'They'll make the floods go down.'

But how would little flowers drink in all the great big sea?

He laughed loud, his noise all startled-bird. She jumped. She felt the zing of petals against her cheeks, a sway inside her. Had the flower changed her, too? Healed her of something she didn't know she had?

'But what do I know about flowers like this?' Pa continued. 'What does anyone? A new species, Moss . . . a new chance. And we're the explorers!'

She saw hope and happy in his face. She dug her fingers into Jess's fur to go steadier. The flower's taste was strong. Now it made her want to shut her eyes and do nothing but dream.

When a gust of wind tried to pull petals from the table, Pa caught them quick.

'If I can just get the mixture right, maybe we'll make the world better without even leaving our island,' Pa said. 'We'll send my book back to show them what we did!'

There was glinting in Pa's eyes, as if pieces of pollen were caught there. He picked up the vase and tilted it. Inside, the mixture glinted too, buzzed like a million fireflies pressed tight. 'Perhaps

whoever first discovered the healing gifts of poppies or willow felt like this too. We could be about to change . . . everything!'

Moss looked back towards the cave's mouth to see ocean swirling and storm clouds coming. 'If the Experiment works, will we see the other land?'

'You remember it?'

Moss frowned to think of that other island, smaller than theirs, so far away on the horizon line. Had seeing it been a dream instead?

'It disappeared,' she whispered.

Pa smiled. 'After we came. When the waters rose to cover it.'

She was thinking hard. 'Maybe when that land comes back we'll know . . .' she shrugged, trying to decide what they'd know, ' . . . we'll know it's safe to return, back to the rest of the world.'

'Maybe.'

Pa took the lid from the vase, and such sweetness came into the air that Moss wobbled again.

Pa put his hand out to steady her. 'Easy, my bird.'

His hand was warmer than before. He squeezed her shoulder before picking up more flowers from the table. He crushed them in his fist and dropped them into the swirling mixture, which turned a deeper shade of orange. He licked his fingers, not wasting a dribble of flower juice, then spat into the vase. The mixture swirled harder.

'What now?' Moss asked.

But she knew. Hadn't Pa told her enough times as they sat around the fire? Hadn't she read it in his book? Now, he'd push this mixture out to the storm, and winds would take the healing pollen back to the rest of the world. But would anything change? Would land return? Would darkness go away? She licked her lips, tasted sweetness.

Pa carried the vase to the cave entrance to where the wind was racing-fierce, dragging Moss's hair over her eyes again. Pa pointed the mouth of the vase towards the storm clouds, his clothing flapping in the wind.

'Change,' Pa whispered.

They watched the mixture swirl up out of the vase and hang in the air as a bright puff, humming and fizzing. Moss's eyes watered. She wanted to stick her tongue out to taste it, keep it with her. But she also wanted to help Pa send it away. If that air went back, the floods would go down. Maybe then they would've fixed the world.

As she thought it, the orange mixture swirled and dived, darted towards the storm clouds.

'Take it,' Pa said. 'Fix us all!'



-TWO YEARS PASS-

ACT TWO. SCENE TWO.

The Scene: An Island
Six Years Previous

The winds continued, and the flowers stayed open. Each morning, Moss watched Pa crush more stormflowers and send them away. Each night, she sat close to him outside their reed-thatched hut and asked about the rest of the world.

'Only we escaped?'

'Only us to this island.'

'But it's safe here?'

Pa nodded. 'Safe for as long as we need.'

Beneath star-glow, Moss waited. She remembered how Pa woke at night as if surfacing from a deep pool, gasping for air, and tucked closer to him, listening to his watery tales. First, Pa told her about the selkies that teased fishermen from their boats. 'Those girls are so pretty, Moss,' he said, 'even if they are half seal!'

She giggled when he winked at her. He told stories about mermaids and mermen. Of sea serpents that lived in deep-darkest waters but might show themselves again, one day. Sometimes, as he

spoke, he threw petals to the fire and made tiny images from his stories live in the embers. Mini mermaids swam through flames. Small serpents curled around coals.

And then, as always, he told her of the kelpies – horses formed from the actual sea itself.

‘Water-spirits,’ he said. ‘Legends say that when there are floods, waterhorses are born from oceans.’

Moss snuggled closer to Pa’s chest. ‘Maybe that’s what happened to the rest of the world. Was it kelpie magic that ruined it? Made it flood?’

From tight against him, Moss felt Pa’s laugh in her own body, and she smiled too. They liked making up new theories for how the world went bad.

‘I wish it were that,’ Pa shook his head sad-slow. ‘But humans ruined the world . . . using too much, being too greedy. Making the darkness.’

‘Were *we* greedy back then?’

Pa’s body went still. Perhaps he could not remember it well, either: their time before. He didn’t talk of it much.

‘Not you, Moss-bird,’ he said. ‘Other people.’ His fingers stroked her left ear, then reached to the battered pot resting on the embers. ‘This is cool enough now.’

He took a sip and licked his lips; he handed the flower-brew to Moss.

‘Fire-water,’ she said when she drank. ‘It zings.’ After she swallowed more, she added, ‘Tell the story about us . . . the one you wrote in your book.’

Pa hugged her tight. ‘Once there was an island,’ he whispered. ‘And it didn’t feed on water and light, like other living things did, it

fed on dreams . . . on stories! Sometimes, if a person wanted something desperately enough – wanted a story – the island made it happen. Its flowers made things change . . .’

Moss took another sip of flower-brew and held it in her mouth like Pa held his, containing the tingle behind her teeth. She felt like a dragon – something else from Pa’s stories – ready to breathe multicoloured flames.

‘Our very own legend,’ Pa said. ‘Flowers that heal; that slip along the wind and alter the air . . . We are so lucky to see it, Moss. One day you and I may be legends too.’

He took his book called *Scrapbook* from out of the hut, ready to read more. She traced her fingers over his joined-up letters.

‘Cursive writing,’ he said, explaining. ‘Linking letters together until they make words, which then make stories.’

Forming stories from scratches: That was magic too.

She turned the pages of the book so gentle, so as not to damage them. As he spoke, she traced a map he’d made of the island: the place for the wild dogs at the top, the long Western Beach stretching down the right side, their cove and hut at the bottom, the rocky coast where their boat had wrecked . . . then, in the middle of the island, the triangle volcano. When her fingers paused over *Lizard Rocks*, Pa paused too.

‘Too much danger there, Moss,’ he warned. ‘Never go there alone.’

He waited for her to nod before continuing.

‘This island’s not on any proper maps,’ Pa said, ‘because whenever someone leaves it, they forget. It no longer exists. Only in dreams do people remember. It’s a secret land – the greatest secret. And to imagine, some people didn’t think the world *had* any more