

When The Ship Comes In

(Bob Dylan – from the 1964 album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*)

'Nearly there!' says Josh, peering through the porthole. But it's night, and with the storm raging outside, and the ship tossing and bucking wildly, I doubt he can see anything through the swirling, brine-filled gale.

'Look, Gemma, home... just there, on the horizon.' He smiles, and a far-away look fills his eyes; he's remembering.

I'm remembering too. The day we fled. I was pregnant with Alicia; she's ten now. Ten years ago. Ten years... a lifetime; Alicia's lifetime. Yes, we were the lucky ones; we escaped. But I still don't know if we were right or wrong. Or if we're right or wrong now. Should we have stayed?

At the time it seemed the best decision for us all. And we had to decide, to stay and fight, or to flee and help from afar. We were a family now, and our country was aflame, and we were in fear of our lives, of our unborn child's life. As we journeyed to the coast, we met others who had made the same decision. And we found a ship, paid the captain well for our journey and escaped over the water.

We found a new home, eventually, and were welcomed by those who supported us. And we made new friends. We kept in touch, as best we could, with those who remained to fight. And supported them, as best we could. Those who replied told us we had been right to flee. A few attempted to make the journey themselves later on. We did not hear from them again.

But building our new lives, I still felt guilty. We should have stayed. We could have made a difference.

Two years ago news began to reach us of changes in our country. The fight was being won, slowly and steadily, by our people; the President ousted finally, those previously in power, losing it, sidelined. There was hope of new beginnings. And despite our new lives, our new friends, we missed our homeland. So we decided to return.

But it is only my homeland, and Josh's. Alicia will be a stranger. We've taken her from her friends, from the only life she has ever known. Have we made another wrong decision?

My eyes are filling with tears, and I begin to sob. Josh hears me, turns from the porthole and hugs me, worry clouding his eyes.

'What's wrong, babe?' he asks, enfolding me gently in his arms.

'We did wrong. We should have stayed... or we were wrong ten years ago.'

He hugs me tighter, stroking my hair and I collapse further into his arms.

'We did right ten years ago, babe. Alicia is the future, and we saved her.'

'But now? Uprooting her? Taking her away?'

'Alicia will be fine. We're all together, and we'll be back home. That's all that matters.'

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The storm clears, and we reach the shoreline. And a banner on the golden sand wafts gently in the breeze. WELCOME HOME