

'I' and the First Boat (excerpt)

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The time has come to launch the floater.

We push the floater down the Blank to the edge of the water. The Blank softens and the water lifts the other end of the floater.

We give the floater a final push.

The floater slides entirely into the water.

The floater rocks gently on the surface. We observe the grand accomplishment with satisfaction. The floater looks big and impressive in the water.

We swim up and climb onto the floater. We get tentacles in the water and start swimming the floater away from the Blank.

We move the floater a short distance, but the cliffs of water keep pushing us back.

Several people jump into the water and push the floater with all their tentacles. It doesn't seem to help. At a certain distance, big cliffs of water just keep pushing the floater back toward the Blank.

After a lot of effort, we are all too tired to try moving the floater anymore. We drift back toward the Blank.

Many people are standing on the Blank, and swimming in the shallow water. They have been watching to see what happens with the floater.

We are all disappointed that the floater didn't get very far.

The floater slowly drifts into the side corner of the Blank area.

We come to a stop on the Blank with a lurch. Some people climb off the floater and move away. Everybody feels exhausted and defeated.

As I squat on the floater to rest my tentacles, I look three eyes at the water. I think about the difficulty we had moving the floater and being stopped by the cliffs of water.

An eye is distracted by land-plant leaf pieces blowing in the wind.

The wind. I think about how we ended up at the far corner of the Blank, instead of the middle. The wind must have pushed the floater sideways, as the water was pushing us backward.

I have an idea.

I find This One and the Giant Shiny Leaf. I want to tell This One my thought about how the Giant Shiny Leaf could be useful.

However, given our current vocabulary, I instead say, “Blurpy, pfffft, Blurpy!”

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After a long and strenuous effort, we have the Giant Shiny Leaf on the floater. We lift up the Giant Shiny Leaf and position it against the side rail at the front of the floater. We secure the Giant Shiny Leaf to the side rail with a lot of the long, low-growing plant.

The wind pushes against the Giant Shiny Leaf and the floater shifts. Because of the Giant Shiny Leaf, the wind pushes the floater off the edge of the Blank and back into the water.

Many people climb onto the floater.

The wind against the Giant Shiny Leaf begins to push the floater away from the Blank. The Giant Shiny Leaf seems to be moving the floater very well.

As we approach the big cliffs of water, the floater is moving much faster than last time. This is the test. Will the wind against the Giant Shiny Leaf get us past this barrier?

The floater plunges into a cliff of water. The front of floater jolts upward. Cool water sweeps over the people on the floater. Flailing tentacles grasp side rails, other people, anything that a tentacle can wrap around.

Stunned, dripping wet, and sprawled all across the floater, we look eyes at each other, and at the water. We are on the other side of the big cliffs of water!

The wind against the Giant Shiny Leaf continues to push the floater across the water.

The Giant Shiny Leaf is working!

We are quickly coming up to the place where we want to stop. This is where we go to meet with the people who still live in the water.

Sometimes people will want to go back with us to the land. Sometimes we just visit those who stay in the water.

I can see a small pod of people waiting for us. A few tentacles wave in the air.

The floater approaches the place where we want to stop.

The floater zips past the place where we wanted to stop, going very fast.

Everybody looks two or three eyes back toward the people in the water. It doesn't take much time before we are unable to see the people in the water anymore. Eyes turn to each other, then mostly toward me.

I turn two eyes toward the Giant Shiny Leaf at the front of the floater. My other two eyes pan independently across the others.

Nobody knows what to do.

I slip over to the side rail and look an eye down at the water flowing under the floater.

The person next to me drops a fruit into the water. We expect to watch the fruit float away behind us. Instead, nearly the instant the fruit touches the water, it's gone!

With two eyes in the direction of where the fruit should be, we look an eye at each other. We now have a better understanding of how fast we are actually moving.

The Giant Shiny Leaf works much better at moving the floater than I would have thought. The Giant Shiny Leaf works better than I wanted.

The floater continues moving across the water, extremely fast.

The light passing fades to darkness.

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As we awaken at the next light, everyone notices that the floater is not moving. The wind has stopped. The floater sits still and quiet in the water.

Then we realize that there is no land visible anywhere — in any direction. There is nothing but water all around us.

None of us has ever been so far out that we couldn't see the land.

I stare down at the dark water with three eyes.

A very uncomfortable feeling swells in me. Nobody knows *what* is out here.

I wonder if being afraid of the water “itches the tentacles” of anyone else.

I look an eye at the Giant Shiny Leaf. It has shifted a little. The long, low-growing plant is loose in places. It occurs to me that being able to adjust the Giant Shiny Leaf might allow better control of the floater.

I hesitate to do anything with the Giant Shiny Leaf right now, though. If it got loose and fell off the floater — what?

I'm not sure but, I think that would be very bad.

If we lost the Giant Shiny Leaf, would we be stuck out here? Maybe we could swim back, but in which direction?

As the light gets brighter, the wind increases. The floater starts moving.

It doesn't take long before the floater is moving very fast again.

The misty air begins to clear.

I'm not the only one feeling uncomfortable with our situation. Everybody keeps eyes looking in all directions for the land.

Several people at the front have apparently seen something interesting. They're bobbing up and down, waving tentacles, and making high-vibration “Blurpy” sounds.

Everybody turns *three eyes* to look — and that's a lot of eyes.

It's unclear in the hazy air, but it *does* look like the land.

The air gets clearer. Something is not right.

Some of the others are also apprehensive.

All our lives, we have seen the land — from far away while in the water to standing four tentacles on it. That is not the shape of the land.

Some of the others begin to express relief and happiness. Maybe they have seen this before.

This One moved on the land for many passings of the light before coming back to tell us about the Giant Shiny Leaf. The land might be bigger than we thought.

From standing on the hill by the Blank, we can see a lot of land. Maybe there's much more land than we realized.

We must be on another side of the land.

Concern fades as my interest grows. I'm very curious to see another side of the land.

Standing at the back of the floater, a person newer to the land starts bobbing up and down and making high-vibration "Blurpy" sounds.

Everybody turns to look — first with one eye, then another, then three wide eyes!

It's just barely visible, but it looks like there's another land in the opposite direction. When the air clears enough, I can see that it's *the* land, *our* land.

Eyes shift rapidly between the two directions.

We can now look in opposite directions and see land both ways.

The realization sweeps across the people on the floater. There are two lands!

The land in this direction looks like the land, our land.

The land in that direction looks like *new land*!

One of the newer people is very agitated. The newer person bobs up and down, points a tentacle in the direction of our land, and makes "Nanbay" sounds.

I am surprised when the newer person jumps off the floater.

I move quickly to the back of the floater and search for the person who jumped in the water. All I see is water.

We are moving very fast. If the person was not injured from jumping into the water, it would still be a very long swim back.

Is there even food along the way? We are already hungry. None of us has eaten since we left the land — our land.

The new land is getting closer. It looks much wider across than our land. The tallest hill goes much higher into the air than any of ours, too.

The wind and the Giant Shiny Leaf keep us moving very fast.

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The light passes to darkness and back to light again. The new land is very close.

This new land is much larger than the land that we have always seen. It is strange to see land that is shaped differently. The features and colors are different, too.

Yet, the new land seems familiar.

There are blank areas, cliffs, and hills.

The most striking thing is the rich green color of the land plants. I have become accustomed to that color, and I like it. It is a pleasant sight.

The floater drifts toward one of the blank areas.

Somebody starts bobbing up and down and making “Blurpy” sounds while pointing a tentacle at the water. Immediately, many eyes are looking in the water.

We see large schools of fish and the kinds of water plants that we usually eat. It doesn’t take long to see that there is a lot of food here. A lot of it!

The floater catches in the middle of a cliff of water. The floater shakes and we are suddenly moving even faster.

Everybody scrambles to wrap a tentacle around something.

The cliff of water is pushing the floater incredibly fast.

This reminds me of the first time I left the water. That was many light passings ago. I haven’t thought about it for a while.

The Blank is coming at us very fast.

Now I remember clearly. The cliffs of water hurled me onto the land, where I got stuck in the Blank. I thought I was going to die.

The Blank is very close and coming at us fast.

Here I go again!

The cliff of water flattens down, and the floater loses speed rapidly. We skim across the shallow area, still moving quite fast as we approach the Blank.

The floater slides out of the water and stops abruptly on the Blank with a lurching thud.

The sudden stop scatters people everywhere. People fall all over the floater. Some fall off the floater and onto the Blank.

We all sit where we fell and look around with all eyes.

It feels strange to be on land again.

It feels strange to look upon new land.

That plant over there. It looks like — it is! It's Nanbay!

We have a lot to do now. We need to find places where land plants block the light during its passing. We need to collect Nanbay and food.

There is much to do.

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