

Asylees as Authors is a non-profit organization that provides scholarships to asylees and refugees. This is the story written by the 2016, 1st place winner from Guinea - P. Zotamou

Black Bird

Many years ago in the village of Omelas, the king and a queen had one daughter, named Jane. It was tradition for sons to inherit their fathers' titles. Unfortunately, despite performing many sacrifices and praying fervently, the king did not have a son. But he did not give up hope.

One night, an older woman in the village dreamt about the king's second child. The next morning, she entered the palace to announce this wonderful news.

"I have big news for you," said the old lady.

"What is it?" The king and queen asked.

"Last night, I dreamt the queen will have a second child," said the old lady.

"Am I having a boy?" said the king excitedly.

"I also wish for a son so I can sleep because the king talks all night about sons," joked the queen.

"I was unable to identify the gender, but this child will be powerful. This child will grow up between pain and love. The beauty of the child will someday touch millions of people's hearts" said the old lady.

"I will keep praying," said the King sadly,

"Thank you for the news," added the queen.

A few weeks later the village heard the old woman died at the same time the queen announced she was pregnant. The queen's pregnancy was unusually long, which confused everyone. The king called witches around the village, who said she was fine, but they could not tell when she was going to have the baby. The king was afraid his wife was hiding something from him, which was affecting her pregnancy. Everyone called this the "Dark Pregnancy."

After a year and five months, the child was finally born. It was another girl, and her name was "Black Bird." The queen died after delivering her child. It was a sad moment. However, the child was the most beautiful girl in the world. Everyone talked about how beautiful she was. This made her older sister angry and jealous. Jane was afraid her little sister was going to inherit all their father's possessions because everyone loved Black Bird for her beauty.

Jane decided to travel with her little sister to different villages far from the kingdom so Jane could discover how much her sister was loved by people who did not know her. Everyone in each village appreciated and even worshipped Black Bird's beauty. This frustrated Jane and made her unhappy, but her sister did not notice. Rather, Black Bird enjoyed the trip and believed her big sister loved her so much. Black Bird would do anything that Jane asked of her.

Realizing this, Jane told Black Bird they would extend the trip to an isolated village where people rarely entered or exited. They had to cross a magic river to reach the village. When they arrived at the river, Jane covered Black Bird with a blanket to hide her beauty. A few minutes later, they heard a voice saying, "In order to cross this river one of you has to sacrifice your life." Jane asked Black Bird to do the sacrifice, convincing her people would kill her anyway for her beauty.

"Women will say their men are after you so they will hate you and kill you," said Jane.

"Big Sister, I have promised that I will obey. Even if it means I lose my life for you," said Black Bird.

"Thank you, my lovely sister. I promise that I will tell our father and the whole village about your bravery," said Jane.

"I love you, big sister. Mom lost her life while delivering me, now it is time to do the same for you, tell daddy I will miss him." said Black Bird.

"Take this letter and give it to Daddy when you arrive," said Black Bird.

"Daddy, if you are reading this, I apologize that Mom died because of me. I do not deserve to be a beautiful girl, so I am letting this beauty go away. I will be with Mom and God and we are going to watch over you and Jane. I hope she looks like you and rules like you. I'm laying down my sign, holding up my hands to say I love you. Know my soul is forever grateful you are my father. Halfway around the world people have worshipped my beauty. I hope you will be proud to know the world appreciates your daughter. I know this is a goodbye, but just remember this, no matter where I am at I will always be your little girl and I love you."

"I love you little sister and I will miss you, but hurry up before it's too late," said Jane.

"Okay, big sister, here I go," said Black Bird.

The North Wind blew on Black Bird and took the blanket away. The monsters in the river saw Black Bird's beauty and let the sisters cross the river. While crossing the river, the letter dropped in the water. One day, the king sent two servants to fish in the river. The sun was not fully risen and they did not catch any fish, but one of them got really cold and asked his friend to make a fire. There was not much dry wood but they saw the letter in the water and used it to start a fire. They opened the letter and saw it was from Black Bird to the king. The two servants rushed back to give the letter to the king, who sent men to search for Jane.

Meanwhile, Jane and Black Bird entered the village safely and spent two weeks there. The villagers also worshipped Black Bird's beauty. This made Jane so angry she prepared to kill her little sister. Jane told Black Bird they would go home. When they were ready to leave everyone brought gifts in worship of Black Bird's beauty. Jane was furious. When Jane knew they were far from all villages, she said "Everywhere we go, why do people always talk about your beauty and forget about me? I will end it all here." That was the first time Black Bird saw her sister's dark side.

Jane killed Black Bird and burned her body. The next day she came back and saw beautiful flowers growing at the pyre. She sat there for many hours. Whenever people passed, they stopped to comment on the beautiful flowers. Jane refused to let people take even one flower. She pulled them all from the ground, tied them together, and threw them far away. A black bird started to follow Jane. Was it her little sister? When they arrived at a village, people told Jane she had a lovely bird. The bird was behaving unusually to try to signal what Jane did to her, but no one understood her motions. At night Black Bird started crying and singing:

"If you understand me, please tell my father

I have been destroyed by my own blood.

Now I see, I should appreciate what God gave me.

I never knew what pain looked like; now, I am feeling pain.

I will let the future avenge my suffering.

I'm not made of gold, but to make my heart, I hide many treasures that people seek again, again,

Good times become good memories and bad times become good lessons, yet still I keep the strength.

There's going to come a day, when you will pay for your wrong doing, but not now

Because you cannot wash mud with mud."

The next morning, people who heard the black bird were confused. The king's men arrived that day and took Jane to the king, who demanded what really happened to Black Bird. Jane was filled with guilt and could not explain. The king saw Jane was hiding Black Bird somewhere. He exiled Jane and commanded her to not return without her sister.

Jane looked for the little black bird to bring to the king as proof of what happened to Black Bird. When she arrived at the river, Black Bird reappeared. Jane begged her sister to transform herself into a person so they could return home. Black Bird refused. Jane was furious, picked up a rock and threw it at the bird. She hit Black Bird, who fell in the river. Jane built a dam to try to find the bird.

Black Bird became a large river rushing toward Jane. The water broke through, and Jane was trapped under the water until she became sand. This is why sand is under water. Every day the water pushes sand to the side, trying to stay away because sand is water's big sister.

The king waited for his daughters, but they never returned. After the king's death, the village removed the old system in honor of Black Bird's memory. Now, when the villagers are listening to the sounds of the river as they go about their daily activities, some swear they also hear the faint, urgent call of a black bird in the distance.