



The Skeleton

“How did it get there?” A young boy dressed stood at the feet of a much older man. He didn’t seem afraid, more curious. Ahead of both of them, half-buried in the blistering sand, was a towering, wooden skeleton. “What is it?”

The old man looked down at the boy and smiled. “It is the hull of a boat,” he said.

“What is a boat?” The boy’s curiosity was getting the better of him. As the old man stood and watched, the boy approached the rotting carcass and began to poke and prod at the ribs.

“Many years ago, this was all underwater. You have never seen such a thing as a lake – none of us has for many years. Back then, freshwater flowed from rivers far away in the mountains. You have seen my cart?” The boy nodded and continued to explore. “Boats were enormous carts, designed to float on water and carry people and food wherever they wanted to go.”

A look of sadness welled up in the man’s eyes, and he brushed away a tear. “When I was a boy, we would hop aboard whichever ship took our fancy and sail with it until the village drifted out of sight. We’d race each other to leap from the bow and swim back to the shore. All of this,” he waved his arms in the direction of the desolate sand, “was fields. Corn grew higher than a man’s head. We ate squashes the size of sheep. We ate sheep.” He chuckled, mainly to himself. “We had a lot of animals back then.”

“What happened?” The boy had returned to his position at the feet of the old man, seemingly content with the skeleton of the boat.

“The Earth warmed up. People had been telling the world for years that this would happen – smarter people than me. People who knew best. But



people didn't want to listen. They wanted to drive their vehicles, sail their boats and live in a world of plastic. Soon, trees started to produce less fruit, crops failed and the rot set in."

One of the man's knees creaked as he stood taller. He beckoned the boy to follow him and led him past the boat and towards the top of another tall dune. "It was startling how quickly it all changed. If one crop fails, a farmer can normally cope. If all his crops fail, then he may starve. If all of the crops fail all across the world, then there is no hope. This is what happened. They tried to make a change, but it was too late. People starved, and countries fell quiet. The animals that could adapt, took over. Those who couldn't, died. Only a few of us humans clung on."

The two of them reached the summit of the dune, and the boy's stare followed the man's finger. At the bottom of the slope, half-hidden and rusted, was the skeleton of another boat. As the boy's eyes took in the flat plain in front of him, he saw a cemetery – each broken skeleton a tombstone of a lost ship.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy a phrase that tells you the old man is sad
2. Which word tells you the boy wants to know more about the boat
3. What does the word "blistering" tell you about the sand?
4. When the old man says he would "hop aboard" a ship, what does he mean?
5. Find and copy a word in the text that means "surprising".

VIPERS QUESTIONS

E

How does the author link the boat to the idea of a dead animal?

E

What impact does this have on you as a reader? Why has the author done this?

I

What evidence is there that the boy has never seen a boat before?

S

Why didn't people listen to the smart people?

R

What was the first boat they saw made from?