Adventures

By the river, where adventures are found. There they rest, the “Adventure Stones”, vast and smooth, way bigger than we can pick up, all settled in the hard, dried mud slope of the riverbank.

We are standing by the mill steps that dip thick and splintered into the river’s shore. You and me, and that friend of Darcy’s that waits here sometimes under arching trees where people look and touch the stones. Embedded curved surfaces that shine, reflecting less than you think. The first time I came here, my knee dislocated, fell in the river. I stand, half pantomime horse, seeing others touch the stones. Most folk who come here do the same thing. They stroke the dust. Behind us, up the steps, the light dangles yellow from the mill door, wood-sprawl building that stretches back along the river’s edge into town. Hang around.

“Pick one”, she says, and that guy with the hat is all angles and string puppet, a lady with a robe next to him. And you say “a million” into air that only you can see is made of fish skin. Now I see it too.

They move closer, trunk twist and roots, and we are all custodians of this stone library. Hat asks how it works, the stones….? He murmurs “They said adventure begins here.”

Darcy’s friend replies “…-. … . -- ” Truth. She looks at the river flowing past. We are all the guardians and keepers and librarians, as stones move. This evening, for now, Darcy’s friend is the librarian of the huge part-buried orbs. Every one of those huge smooth stones is an adventure.

Our feet dainty on shore ridges, we arch our night wings closer to the mill-glinted cheekbones, gazing the lines of stones, like a wall of the riverbank, boulders set deep in mud. Closer to surfaces. Trees shimmer like fingers - above us the grass bank that runs by the fields and woods, as fences nod off into the hillside, somewhere, or to the sea. Trees and path gossip the bubble river’s story, while truth flows. Your lip edge lifts, cheek dimples a smile at “Painting that wall while I was on the roof”, remembering when another pair of us said “the land cannot tell the sky”. And I jumped, and we heard the thud. Now these stones surface, heavy and dark, light bounces the sky in patina of riverbed clay. If you want an adventure you take a stone from the riverbank. The land still cannot tell the sky, but here, by the riverbank, it can tell us who walk. “Pick a stone,” says Darcy’s friend, and the visitors stroke their surfaces.

It would take four or five , six people to lift it. Take it home. Stone surfaces are tiny hieroglyphs, same as all stones have, or just scratches. Your robe. I chuckle, heard it before, because it came to me, I made this place.

Every stone here is an Adventure. If you want an Adventure, take one, and an Adventure will be yours. They say there are two types: Physical adventures, and those of the mind. Someone comes down the steps and-

We, they, feel the weight, pull you, come near. Around me the trees stir. I am the librarian now, speaking through shaking leaves. It will be a stone. In your living room.

“You mean I take one home? If we do, can no-one else have the same adventure?”

Each stone will be there for whoever looks at it.

“How will I get it home, if I can’t pick it up?”

I turn to the river. To the trees’ whispering leaves. How does it ripple? How do they move? Physical adventures, and those of the mind.

“How do we tell which is which?”

Ah, I remember now. You humans tend to think there is a difference.

“Well, there is. One is the real world, and one is imagination.”

Ah, you understand. You are finely attuned. Pick one: it will be the kind you think it is.

“How do you mean?”

You will be able to tell which stone is an adventure in the real world, and which is an adventure of the mind. Go on, pick one, and tell me which it is. Touch it. The Stones will tell you, when you connect, when you are correct.

And he does, and says, “This one’s… an.. adventure in the real world! ?.”

Well done. You are right. Pick another.

“This one? This is.. also an adventure in the real world.!.”

You see. You can tell the difference. If you want an adventure in the real world, you will get what you want.

And he touches a huge stone, and slightly nods, and looks at his beloved, and says “How do you feel about this one, honey?” and she looks and touches it, they agree. Sheen.

He’ll get friends, a pickup truck, muscle struggles and tattoos, and good luck. As they fade, …Another group comes down the stairs, look at the stones, and from the grassy bank up high Paolo laughs distantly “Can I interest you in an absence of being?”. Neighbour with a truck, bf. Your sleeve is long on your hand. And for the first time ever ever ever it occurs to me that my hand must feel like something to you, when I don’t exist in me.

No-one owns the stones, air they’ve breathed in. Images they never reflected are what we touch in dance.

The sky now has less of a daytime echo. Clouds’ underbellies move orange in early evening light, their cooling sunglow drifts down like a shower, sprinkles these fresh visitors’ shoulders, blending nature’s light with a yellow haze from the glowing bar at the back of the Mill. One of the new group calls down from the thick wooden platform “I’d like an adventure in the real world!” and another sings “I’d like an adventure of the mi-i-iind”. As ever, you hold me as I pretend to stumble, offering them a pick-and-choose, parts of riverbank they meander to, and caress as they ask if the stone they touch is what they seek … “Yes”, I say, “You can sense what you wish”.

Hair flickers dark beneath the night-bronze flicker of willow. : : ; There is a room in the Mill where, for a while, I grew up. A large empty dormitory of wood boards, with many beds, and a crib, wardrobes, and curtains that were once called velvet, now lost as dust and never hanging straight. Wood floor and panels, dry attic, and heaped brocade sheets. Wherever your home is, or isn’t, there will be a stone which is your adventure. Or you are the stone’s own adventurer. The stones are alive, and we are their thoughts. We play to manifest what lies within. How do we know. How..

“..-can you feel what’s right for you. When none of us ever know.” It’s Paolo’s voice! He is up on the ridge, not sure whether to go further along the river path, away into the woods, those tall pines or elders… and the air is different there, never really moving like a breeze, but always moving internally, every part of air moving as minutely as we do. Paolo leans on the fence by the path at the top of the slope, looking down on us standing dark in the spilt silt of the river’s bed.. while we work out places to go, as you do, Paolo, among paths, stopped by the freedom of choice. Paolo, my dear friend, I laugh.. For all your height, your feet are still in silt.

If you can carry home an Adventure Stone it will stay there, resting in your living room, impossibly heavy, bending floorboards and space. A dimly shiny orb of silicone and iron and oxygen, huge and unavoidable. And while it sits in your home, immoveable, you will have to walk around it, and so will your friends and visitors. And they will ask you why you have such a huge stone filling up your living room. They will ask why you brought into your life an inescapable thing, so impractical. And you will say that it is an Adventure Stone. You once chose it from a riverbank, so that you would have an adventure, but it has not worked, because no adventure has happened, and you are now stuck with a giant stone that you cannot move or get out of there, a black hole that draws all attention. And your friends will ask “When you got it.., what did you think would happen?” And you tell them of something you always wanted to do, travel to Peru, climb Pyramids, or leave your home with no plan, just a backpack and a six-sided dice. And they will say “What’s stopping you?”

They will come round to your home again, and say “Still got that stone, then?”, and they will pester you about your adventure, until finally you look at maps, and work out how to acquire a ticket. All the while a stone sits in your living room, as you start to have your adventure. What happens to you, and what you do, will not be what you thought, what you imagined you would see, because adventures are that and more,., plans are a fluttering bat that you never dreamed would happen. Is this “adventure”?

For some, nothing new lights up with their next birthday candles. If you get used to the stone in your room, if you believe ‘living rooms’ are for living., and no-one ever comes over to open your eye doors, and ask about the big thing, or they visit and you do not listen to their questions, or if the adventure stone stays there heavy, and nothing changes, then maybe you are already dead, or you are already having the adventure that suits you. Or both.

The few new guys from the Mill, so many boots below long coats, deep green cloth folds, arms caress the stones, a delicate ballet as they step between us and orbs and the slope, library browsing, treading over these hard ruts of mud in the dried riverbed.

A breeze picks up.

There are no holes in the riverbank. Ever. No gaps or losses. People take a stone sometimes, leaving a hole big enough for three dreamers to curl in. But when you come here, the riverbank never has any holes. It’s as if the stones regrow, refill, a new hard orb, always appearing time worn as if it had been there since the beginning of adventures of tiny creatures. I have come here a few times since I lived in that dry room, sometimes with Paolo, or Darcy, or Darcy’s friend, or you, and have often helped set winches, tie ropes, or lowered a truck… but I have never seen a hole where a stone has been and gone.

I love the way the willow’s leaves flutter and stream in the breeze. Starlight begins to shimmer on the river’s rippling surface. I lick the earth, rub fingers in clay, paint marks on your face. We look up the slope. Feel the energy of the place, the mud, the stones making movement from intransience, and the deep breaths of woodland nearby. Time to go.

The Mill visitors pick a stone each. People always pick the right one for them. Between mind and the real world, in the reflected river, a believed orb of difference.

As we step up the mud slope, up to the grassy path that leads around the Mill, you ask me about the dent in the middle of my floor. “Where did it lead to?”

I’m still finding out.