

PEOPLE OF THE SUN by Ben Gartner

EXCERPT

When they came out of a pine forest and could see the lake below, with Tenochtitlan as a dazzling island city, John couldn't help but mutter, "Wow."

He heard his sister mumble the same thing.

The city sparkled and spread out with a much bigger footprint than John had imagined. He'd heard of the famed city of the Aztec, but he'd always pictured something . . . smaller. This was a regular metropolis, with suburbs and floating islands and multiple huge temples. Canoes drifted on canals like the pictures he'd seen of Venice in Italy, though these canoes were loaded with goods headed to market. Farther out into the lake, men cast nets and brought up flopping silver fish, their scales sparkling in the sun.

John's mouth watered when he saw a floating garden bursting with leafy greens. The rectangular plot of land had poles sticking out of each side, securing boards that held the dirt like a raised garden bed back home. But this was in the middle of the lake. John squinted at the marvel of it all.

The sound of sloshing water pulled his stare toward a stone trough that started in the hills and was then suspended on man-made islands right across the lake and into the city. "An aqueduct?"

"For our drinking water," Ome said.

"But you're on a lake," John said, implying that there was fresh water all around.

"Lake Texcoco is too salty to drink. Great for the fish, bad for the people," Huitzi said.

"There are dikes that keep some fresh water close to the island, but that is used for farming," Ome added.

Wow. John never knew that either. They lived on a lake and yet had to build a system of aqueducts to bring in safe drinking water. Amazing.