

Refuge

Midsummer. About 11 o'clock. A girl skips along a sandy path leading out of a forest. The fields around her are bright with wild flowers and you can hear the buzzing of bees. The girl stops to smell an especially big dandelion, picks it, and threads it into one of her long, blonde plaits. She then resumes her journey. The small village is soon in sight. All is strangely quiet. Suddenly the smile on the girl's face is wiped away. There, on the local news board it says it in thick, black letters. Her worst nightmare come true. **CIVIL WAR.**

That was two months ago. I still remember my parent's faces when I told them, crying, shouting. A few days later the guards came for them. Now it's just me and my brother, Amos. Suddenly Amos burst into my room. "Lylis! They're coming! They know!" I knew who he meant. The false leader's spies had found us. We had to leave at once. I hastily stuffed my few belongings into a bag and, as if on cue, there was a banging on the door. "Quick! Out through the bathroom window!" He half pulled, half pushed me through the narrow corridor and into the bathroom. "I can't reach!" "Well you'll have to." He pushed me up, through the narrow gap and I landed in a heap on the floor outside. Just at that moment the guards outside shattered the door and pushed into the house.

I burst into my sister, Lylis' room. Ryak had called me. There were guards on the way to our house. "Lylis! They're coming!" She froze, and then started stuffing things wildly into a bag. Then the banging started. I shoved my sister into the bathroom and out of the window. She protested and said she couldn't reach, she had always been short. I pushed her up and out of the window. Then the door gave away. Guards flooded into the house. "Here's the boy!" One of the guards shouted, yanking open the bathroom door. "But what about the girl?" They spent two hours ransacking our house, looking for Lylis, but we had reacted just in time. She, at least, had got away.

I ran. I didn't care what happened to Amos, but right now, getting away was my only concern. I knew I had to make it over the border. I and Amos had discussed it so I knew what route I needed to take. I slowed my pace a bit; after all, I wanted to make it to the next village before dark and if I kept going at this speed, I would tire myself out within minutes. Suddenly I heard a noise. I turned around, but there was no one there. I carried on walking. Then there was another rustling. Someone was definitely following me. I tried not to panic, but we hadn't practiced at all for this kind of situation. Wild thoughts whizzed through my head about hiding in a hole, or climbing a tree. Actually, climbing a tree wasn't such a stupid plan. But to do it, I needed a head start. I started sprinting.

I was sitting in a forest, leaning against a tree. How had I got there? Where was Lylis? I ran my hand through my hair, trying to remember. Suddenly I winced. My head was covered with bruises. Suddenly it dawned on me. Guards bursting into the house, *our* house, dragging me out. The search for Lylis, the fight, the escape. I tried to stand up, but my leg gave away under me. I remember one of the guards having a metal rod, and using it. This was the result. I broke a sturdy branch off a tree and used it as a crutch. I could at least walk now. Suddenly I heard a twig snapping near me. I peered through the foliage. There was someone walking. A guard, perhaps? I decided to follow them. Maybe they would lead me to somewhere a little more populated. I needed to get my bearings. I took a tentative step and nearly cried out loud with pain. I hesitated, and took another step. Suddenly I heard hasty footsteps. I had been seen, or heard. Well, there was no chance of me catching up now, not with my injured leg. I would have to spend the night in the forest.

I breathed a sigh of relief. I had made it up a tree. Suddenly I realised just how tired I was. A little rest wouldn't hurt, surely?

I woke up the next morning, stiff and hungry. I hadn't thought to bring food. Amos usually thought of things like that. Oh Amos, how I wish he were with me now. I jumped down from the tree and started walking. The border couldn't be far now, we had chosen our house for that exact reason. Suddenly I realised

that I wasn't heading for the border after all! I was retracing my steps from before! The night in the tree must have disorientated me. I was about to turn back, but it was too late. Someone pushed me over and held a knife to my throat.

I was woken by the pain in my leg. It hurt even more than yesterday. I tried to move it, but the pain was too great. Without realising it, I fell asleep again. This time I was woken by a noise. Someone was coming my way. Was it the guard from yesterday, sent to investigate? They hadn't seen me yet, but they could turn around any moment. Ignoring the ever growing pain in my leg, I leapt towards the shady figure and pushed them over. I groped for the knife in my pocket and pressed it to their throat. But wait... I'd recognise those long blonde plaits anywhere! "Lylis?" "Amos!"

Two weeks later. A boy and a girl are standing in front of a tent. Around it stand other tents. This is Ivy Lake, a refugee camp. It might not be five stars, but the two are happy. They have made it over the border safely. They have reached refuge.

