

A TWINKL ORIGINAL

SOMEWHERE CALLED HOME





A TWINKL ORIGINAL

SOMEWHERE CALLED HOME

First published 2023 © Twinkl Ltd of Wards Exchange,
197 Ecclesall Road, Sheffield S11 8HW

Copyright © Twinkl Ltd. 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording or by any information and retrieval system, without permission
in writing from Twinkl Ltd.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and
incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a
fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead,
or actual events is purely coincidental.

Twinkl is a registered trademark of Twinkl Ltd.



Twinkl Educational Publishing

A Note for Adults before Sharing with Children

'Somewhere Called Home' is a story that follows a family fleeing a fictional country facing war. The experiences the family have and the characters they meet are intended to provoke discussion and thought around the important and challenging subject of refugees. The language used by some characters may be upsetting and uncomfortable at times. This is intentional in order to help children understand the experiences many refugees face. [Additional resources](#) have been created in order to explore this language, to support children in their understanding and to promote empathy.

You should read the story in full before introducing it to children to ensure that you are comfortable sharing its themes and events in your setting. We also urge you to read the [adult guidance](#) as this will inform you of the specific language and themes encountered in each chapter. We encourage you to look at the full collection of [additional resources](#) for this story as they have been designed to support you in facilitating discussions in your setting. Please also note that there is a [glossary](#) in this eBook, where you can find definitions of challenging vocabulary.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	1
CHAPTER TWO	16
CHAPTER THREE	33
CHAPTER FOUR	47
CHAPTER FIVE	61
CHAPTER SIX	77
CHAPTER SEVEN	89
CHAPTER EIGHT	104
CHAPTER NINE	122
CHAPTER TEN	139
CHAPTER ELEVEN	158
GLOSSARY	176



CHAPTER ONE



There are far too many people crowded onto this little boat. I know it's going to sink before it can get us to safety.

The adults know it too. I can see the truth in their frightened eyes as they grip the sagging sides of the rubber dinghy and peer into the distance, trying to spot dry land past the foaming waves and sea spray. Dada's trying to distract my little sister, Panny, with stories of the adventures her teddy bear goes on when she's asleep, while Mami's singing nursery rhymes to Gilmot so he won't cry. Pan is six and Gil is only four – they believe the grown-ups when they tell us everything will be all right. But I'm eleven and



I can see through that. There are no words or songs that can take my mind off the danger we're in, out here on the ocean miles from the island. I can see for myself that the air is slowly leaking from our inflatable raft as the waves toss us up and down.

"Alina, keep away from the side!" Dada warns when a big wave breaks against the boat and he sees me leaning over the water to catch hold of my rucksack before it gets washed away. I bite my tongue to stop myself complaining that there's no space to move and my bag's too heavy for me to manage on my own now that it's soaking wet. It's not Dada's fault there's over fifty people packed into a boat meant for fifteen and we're sinking in the ocean. He's not to blame for telling us to pack our whole lives into four rucksacks and leave the pretty log cabin by the lake where I grew up. The soldiers who caused this are far, far away where my anger can't reach them.

I clench my fists when I think of the army that invaded my country, their bombs and bullets sending families like mine fleeing for the border. My nails dig harder into my palms when I

remember the border guards who stopped us with their barbed wire and barking dogs, giving us no choice but to hide away in trucks to make the long journey to the coast. And when I think of the way the boat owners treated us when we eventually reached the beach, forcing us into a dinghy so small and flimsy we were sure to sink, I grit my teeth so hard my head hurts. They took all our money and then they stole our phones so we couldn't call for help. They didn't even give us the lifejackets we'd been promised, even though Mami told them there were people on board who didn't know how to swim. I heard Dada say later that if he'd known they were 'people smugglers' instead of boat owners trying to help us, he never would've agreed to bring us to the beach. It's too late to go back now. We're in the middle of the sea with nothing but a few bags of clothes left and a leaky dinghy to cling on to.

"Land!" someone shouts, pointing off into the distance. At least, that's what I think he's saying as I learnt a few other languages in school. I don't know as many as Mami, though. We're the only family on board from Lapagonia – none of the other refugees are from a country

as far north as ours. I still find it strange calling myself a 'refugee'. But my parents say that's what we are now, even though we're still the same people we were before the war.

"He can see the island." Mami says it in our own language first and then she translates it for some of the other people in the boat. I can see the outline of Trigós through the salty spray now too. My parents say that if we can reach the beach, then we'll be taken to the refugee camp. That's a place where people like us, who are running away from things like war, have to stay because we don't have a home any more. Mami says we'll get our 'asylum claim' processed there – I'm not sure exactly what that means. I think it's got something to do with the government deciding whether they're going to let us live in Dorrica or not. Dada says not to worry and that we'll only stay in the camp for a week – ten days at most – and then our claim will be processed. After that, we'll be taken to the Dorrican mainland, where we can start a new life. I know it won't be home like our log cabin by the lake. It'll be safe, though – that's something to look forward to.

But we have to get to the island of Trigos first. Everyone's noticed that the dinghy's sides are drooping. The adults are all scrambling to bale the water out with their hands while the children cling to each other and cry. I don't think we're going to make it.

The man at the front of the boat shouts something else. I feel weak with relief when Mami tells us the coastguards are coming to rescue us. It's not long before I can hear the roar of the motorboats ploughing through the waves in our direction. I want to wave at them but I'm too scared to move in case I tumble over the side of the rocking dinghy. My heart is dancing with hope until I realise the adults are muttering instead of smiling. That's when I know something's wrong. When I see the three boats that are circling us, I understand what it is. These are fishing boats, not the coastguards we were expecting. The men inside aren't trying to save us.

"You're not welcome here!" shouts one of the men as the driver of his boat cuts right across our path, sending a big wave crashing over the side of the dinghy.

"Turn round and go back to where you came from!" yells another. "We don't want you here!"

Even though I didn't learn Dorrican in school, I can understand what they're saying. Mami worked as a translator for a chocolate company before I was born – she taught me to speak it when I was little so she could keep practising. Although she didn't go back to work, her translating skills are more important than ever now. Mami's the most useful member of the whole group as she helps us understand each other. When she translates what the men are saying, the adults in our dinghy start shouting at the fishermen. The refugees sound angry and aggressive. They're not, though – they're all just scared like me.

"Alina, why don't they want us here?" Pan asks, clutching her teddy and shivering as more water is sent splashing into our boat.

"I don't know." I frown, trying to work out what we've done wrong. The boat owners who turned out to be people smugglers said the coastguards would come and pick us up if we got into trouble in the water. It's not illegal to

be a refugee and flee to safety so I can't work out why the fishermen are shouting at us.

Our boat rocks again as the lead motorboat drives too close, making us all tumble into each other. Dada has to grab Pan's hand so she doesn't fall into the sea.

"Watch what you're doing!" he yells at the boats. "There are children on board!"

I don't think the fishermen care. Four or five in each boat lean over the sides and shout right back at us. They all look mean and angry. 'Maybe they're scared of us too,' I think. But then, I realise that's silly. Why would they be afraid of a dinghy full of frightened refugees who just want a safe place to stay?

"Bam-Bear doesn't like being wet!" Pan wails, holding up her teddy and wringing its arms and legs out. It's pointless, as we're all soaked through and knee-deep in water. I help her anyway, hoping I can distract her from the boats that are trying to turn us back even though we've got nowhere to go.

Just when I think the waves are going to capsize us and we'll all end up in the sea, I hear a louder roar approaching from the island. At first, I'm frightened that it's more fishermen come to stop us landing. Then, I see it's a much bigger boat with writing on the side. When I squint through the sea spray, I can read the Dorrican word that says 'Coastguard'.

"We're saved," I sigh in relief, giving Pan and Bam-Bear a hug and reaching over to ruffle Gil's wet hair.

There's another small fishing boat riding by the side of the big rescue vessel. I wonder if the man driving it is the one who told the coastguards where to find us, as he's pointing to us and yelling at the other fishermen to stay out of our way. The other motorboats all back off when the coastguards arrive but the men inside don't stop shouting at us. When I look over at them, I can see they're not all adults like I thought. Inside one of the boats are a couple of older teenagers with another boy who looks about my age. He's got curly, black hair and a hostile look on his face that tells me he doesn't want us to be rescued. If I wasn't so scared, I'd stick my

tongue out to show him what I think of him and his nasty friends. Instead, I hug my little sister and hold on to Dada's arm, too busy trying to keep my balance to pay any more attention to him.

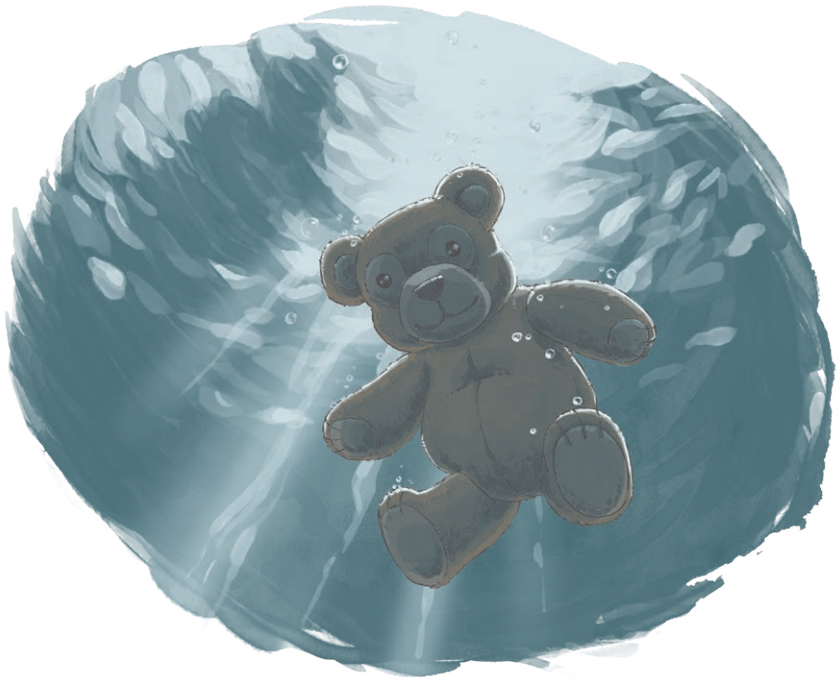
When the coastguards let down a ladder, our dinghy rocks even more wildly as people scramble over each other to reach it. "Hand the children up first," the woman at the top of the ladder shouts. The refugees ignore her even though Mami translates as loud as she can. Everyone is frightened and wet and wants to get out at once. Dada does his best to hold Gil above the waves and keep us all steady as our boat sags further under the stamping feet. By the time it's our turn, though, our rucksacks with the last of our things have sunk into the sea and we're almost paddling over to the ladder. Dada stands on the ladder and helps Mami and Gil up, swaying with the rise and fall of the waves as he reaches back for Pan, who's still in the dinghy with me.

I lift Pan up as high as I'm able so she can catch hold of Dada's hand. I don't see what happens next as her legs are right in front of

my face. Something goes wrong somehow and she doesn't quite make it. Dada slips on the ladder as he tries to steady her, yelling at her to hold on. For one awful moment, I think they're going to go tumbling into the sea. Then, more hands reach down from above to pull Pan to safety. She struggles in their grasp, yelling, "Bam-Bear! Bam-Bear!" and when I look where she's pointing, I see her teddy's fallen into the water.

Dada lifts me onto the ladder and the hands pull me up too. When I'm finally on the deck, I can breathe more easily, thinking that we're all safe. But when I look back down, Dada's hesitating, trying to decide what to do. "Dada, leave it!" I cry, afraid he'll end up in the sea as well if he tries to rescue Bam-Bear. "It's just a toy." Even as I say it, I know it's not true. That daft teddy with its big, brown eyes and goofy smile is Pan's whole world now that everything we ever loved is gone. She's fighting so hard to get back down the ladder I'm scared she's going to get hurt.

Dada sees the tears that are running down her face and makes up his mind, gripping the ladder



with one hand and leaning out as far as he can for Pan's bear.

That's when one of the motorboats circles past us again. It speeds by so close and fast that the backwash makes the big coastguard boat bob up and down.

Dada wobbles on the ladder, his fingers losing their grip. Before I can even cry out, he goes tumbling head first into the sea. My heart stops, time slowing down like everything's moving at

half speed. All around me, people are yelling and running for lifebuoys. I stand stock-still, my eyes fixed on the bright spot of water where Dada disappeared. The light used to glisten like that on the surface of the lake next to our house, too. When Mami swam with me in summer, she used to joke that the sun was thirsty and kissing the waves to get a drink. It used to make Dada laugh when he sat on the shore watching Mami and me catching sun kisses in our cupped hands. Hearing his big, booming laugh dancing across the water and tickling my ears would make me giggle, too.

I'm not laughing now. Dada never learnt to swim.

The light dancing on the water is shattered into a thousand pieces by the motorboats, reminding me that I'm not sitting by the peaceful lake but sailing on a dangerous sea. Time's all wrong: the coastguards are too slow and the motorboats are too fast. Dada's still not surfaced yet. Something splashes in the water next to the small fishing boat that led the coastguard here, bright oranges and yellows mixing with the cloudy blue of the waves. At

first, I think it's a lifejacket. Then, I see there's a man swimming through the waves, diving down when he reaches the place Dada disappeared. I don't realise I've been holding my breath this whole time until he comes back up and I see he's got Dada with him. When the coastguards pull Dada up the ladder, he sits coughing and spluttering on the deck, trying to get rid of all the water he's swallowed. As soon as he catches his breath, he gives me a shaky smile to show me he's not hurt. My knees go weak with relief and I grin back.

The coastguards are shouting at the men in the motorboats, telling them to leave. The man from the fishing boat who saved Dada is shouting at them too, using Dorrican words that I know aren't polite as Mami never taught them to me. The fishermen are all yelling back, their faces screwed up and their words just as angry. Before they drive off, I catch sight of the boy with the black, curly hair. He's staring straight up at me, his face no longer screwed up in a scowl like it was before. Instead, his eyes are wide and he looks shocked. I don't know why. Everyone knows stopping a dinghy from landing is dangerous and might make people drown.

I forget all about him as our big boat heads to shore, carrying us to safety. Mami's eyes are lost in a faraway stare and Gil's bottom lip is trembling as we hug Dada, holding on to him tightly even though he's soaking wet. I feel faint with relief that he's safe, until I remember Pan. I turn round to see she's clinging on to the boat rails instead, staring back at the spot where Bam-Bear has sunk to the bottom of the sea and sobbing like her heart is breaking.

CHAPTER TWO



The refugee camp is not what I'm expecting. The only camp I've ever been to is the holiday camp we used to go to every August when the schools were out. It's not like that at all. Instead, it's like a prison.

Mami carries Gil to make sure he doesn't get trampled by the big group of refugees getting off the truck that drove us from the beach. Dada holds Pan's hand as the guards herd us through the gates like we're sheep being rounded up in a field. Even though I'm not a little girl any more, I can't help holding on to Dada's other hand when I see just how big the camp is and how many people are crowded in here. Everywhere I

look, I see tents sitting so close together they're almost on top of each other. The narrow streets between the tents are piled with rubbish and filled with children in grubby clothes playing in the dust. There's barbed wire fencing stretching so far in every direction that I wonder if we'll ever find our way back to the entrance gates again.

"I don't like it here," Gil whimpers. "It smells."

Although I agree, I'm too busy holding my nose to answer him. Mami tries to make the best of it. "It'll be just like going camping in the Altic Forest last year – remember that? You had lots of fun."

Gil is too small to remember the holiday; he just wrinkles his nose and sticks his thumb in his mouth in reply. It worries me to see him do that, as he stopped sucking his thumb when he was a year old. Ever since the army invaded our country and the bombs fell from the sky like giant hailstones, he's been clinging to Mami and acting like a baby again. Dada is worried that Gil might not be ready for school on the mainland next term. I've heard him and Mami



whispering at night about how important education is and how hard it will be for us to catch up now that we've missed so much. I can only hope there'll be lessons here in the camp or I'll never become a doctor like I've always dreamed.

"You see that tent, Pan?" I say, pointing one out as we pass and trying to sound cheerful. "It's the same colour as our holiday tent last year – the one you put a big hole in when you tripped and fell trying to catch that football I kicked too hard. Do you remember? Hey, Panny!" But my sister doesn't look round. She doesn't even seem to hear me. Her eyes used to sparkle with laughter back in Lapagonia before the war. Now, they're fixed on the ground, dull with misery as we shuffle through the refugee camp.

We follow the guards and the long line of refugees to a circle of tents that looks like some sort of administration area. It takes for ever to fill out all the forms in the processing centre, especially now that our rucksacks with all our identity papers have been swallowed by the sea. Even though a nice group of people, who say they're from the Dorrican Refugee Charity, pass

out soup and blankets while we're waiting, it's only when they take us to another tent for a dry set of clothes that I finally stop shivering. I try to be grateful although the trousers I get are too long and the T-shirt hangs down to my knees, as anything's better than the wet clothes I had on before.

"I don't think I'll ever be cold again in a country this hot!" I tell Dada as another charity worker leads us to our tent. "It was freezing in the sea – now, I feel like one of Mami's honey biscuits baking in the oven."

"It'll be cooler soon." Dada smiles, pointing to the sun that's slowly setting behind the hills at the back of the camp. "It's only spring – wait until summer and then you'll feel like one of my burnt rice puddings instead of your mother's biscuits!" Dada sees my face fall so he says quickly, "But you'll get used to it. It'll be nice living on the mainland and going for picnics in winter instead of shivering indoors, surrounded by snow."

Dada's trying to be reassuring but I scowl and look away. I loved the sparkle of snow in winter

when the clouds opened and the first white flakes began to fall. My favourite way to spend the evening was sitting by the fire listening to Mami read stories while the wind howled around our snug cabin. I don't want to get used to this strange place where the heat is itchy and flies crawl over the rotting rubbish dumps. I want to go home.

"Here you are," the charity worker says in Dorrican, showing us the tent we've been assigned. I think it will be cooler inside and so I hurry to get out of the sun. I find, instead, that the air in here is sticky and smells of the sour lemon spray they've used to keep away the mosquitoes. At least we've been given big bottles of water along with blankets and foam mattresses for us to sleep on. Gil curls up and starts snoring as soon as Mami sets him down. Pan just sits on the floor, though, with her knees tucked under her chin, staring blankly at the tent wall like her thoughts are miles away. I want to find some words to comfort her but it's too stuffy and uncomfortable inside the tent to think straight. My parents were given ration books at the administration tent and told that we had to get these stamped at the canteen in

order to collect our family's share of food and water. As soon as Dada takes our ration books from his pocket and tells Mami he's going to collect dinner for us all, I jump up to help him.

Dada stops me before I've taken ten steps down the street between the tents. "Go back inside, Alina," he says. "I don't want you getting lost."

"I won't be lost if I'm with you, will I?" I point out. "Anyway, I want to see where the food gets handed out." I won't see much more than that, as the sun's going down and the light is fading fast. The camp is lit by spotlights mounted on the barbed wire fencing, which throw eerie shadows on the tent walls. Even though this new place makes me nervous, I know as long as I stick by Dada's side, I can pretend to be brave.

"Not tonight, Alina," Dada snaps. "Just do as you're told and go back inside, OK?"

I nod and take a step back, watching Dada make his way through the city of tents until he disappears in the dark. He doesn't usually talk to me like that. I know he's tired and hungry and worried about his family, but his angry words

still make my eyes sting. I brush the tears away before they can fall and walk back to the tent. Sitting down outside, I glare at everyone who passes by like I'm a vicious guard dog instead of an eleven-year-old girl who feels sad and homesick. Nobody pays me any attention. It's like I don't even exist any more.

I'm so busy feeling sorry for myself that I don't hear the voice right next to me until there's a tug on my T-shirt and the question is repeated.

"Where are you from?"

I look round to see a girl of about thirteen with bright red hair frowning at me like I'm a puzzle she's trying to work out. The boy next to her is a couple of years younger, with hair even redder than his sister's sunburnt cheeks. "Ask her again in Dorrican," he says to her. "Maybe she doesn't speak Reggish."

"I don't know how to say it in Dorrican," the girl whispers back. "Do you?"

The boy shakes his head.



"It's all right," I say to them. "I can understand as long as you speak slowly. I learnt Reggish in school before the war."

"What war?" the boy says at the same time as his sister asks again, "Where are you from?"

"The war in Lapagonia," I tell them, answering both questions at once. "It's why my family had to leave." I think back to the news reports about Regland I saw on TV and ask them, "Did you leave your country because of the... the... plants not working?" I can't find the words for the

'crop failures' that the journalists talked about on the news. The girl seems to understand what I mean, though, and she nods.

"There was nothing to eat and our parents couldn't get jobs. There was no heat in winter and the schools all closed. It was terrible so we came here. They're not going to let us go to Dorrica, though, because we're just –" and then she says a couple of words that I don't understand.

"What does that mean?" I ask, repeating them slowly.

"It means we're not proper refugees like you – although if we do go back, we'll starve to death." The boy says it carelessly, like it doesn't matter, but there's a flash of hurt in his eyes as he looks at me. I can work out now what the words mean. Dada says there's a big difference between being a refugee and something he calls an 'economic migrant'. I'm not sure I know exactly what that means – I think maybe it's when people leave their country to look for a job because there aren't any where they live. Dada says that you should only get help if you're

escaping from something terrible like war. If you move to another place to look for work, you just make things difficult for all the people who really need help. But Mami says that hunger can kill you just like bombs and so economic migrants need help, the same as we do. I don't know what I believe. I know that Lapagonia was rich before the war – not like Regland, which was poor even before the crop failures. I've also heard other adults on the journey here say that refugees from Lapagonia deserve help and economic migrants from Regland don't. No wonder the boy looks angry.

"How long have you been here?" I ask, noticing the girl's grubby T-shirt and the holes in the boy's trousers.

"Eight months," she says. "But that's not too bad. There are people who've been here for two years or more."

"Two *years*?" I gasp. "Dada said we'd be here a week. Ten days at most."

"Maybe you will," the girl shrugs. "It depends."

"It depends on what?"

"On how important your parents are."

"Important...?" I don't understand her. I frown, trying to work it out. "Important to who?"

"To Dorrica." The boy sighs like I'm really clueless and talking to me is an effort. "They don't want poor people like us. They want rich people."

"Or clever people," the girl puts in. "Like Fintal's mother – remember? He was here for less than a week. His mother was a surgeon. She worked in a hospital in the capital city before the religious police took over their country and stopped women from working any more. People like her are really important to Dorrica and they take them in right away."

"Oh," I say, my heart sinking as I finally understand. I should have known. I'd already seen the way it worked when the war started and we tried to escape. The other countries only let doctors and scientists with fancy degrees over the border. Since Dada's a mechanic and

Mami stayed at home for years to look after us, they didn't let us in. Ordinary people who just worked hard and looked after their children didn't count. The other countries told us that we're not wanted. They don't think we 'deserve' help the way that rich or educated people do. I thought it would be different in Dorrica and that we'd be welcome here. After what happened with the men in the fishing boats, it's obvious that everywhere's just the same.

"Eddis, Tolia," a woman calls from a nearby tent. "Come back in – it's getting late."

The brother and sister from Regland turn away and run back to their tent without a backward glance. "I'm Alina," I call after them, even though they didn't ask.

I sit there waiting for Dada to come back with our dinner, my stomach aching with hunger. He takes so long I'm falling asleep with my head on my knees by the time he returns to our tent. We try to make the best of the lumpy stew in little plastic boxes but it's lukewarm and tastes like burnt rubber. Even Gil only eats half – and he's a human vacuum cleaner when it

comes to food.

When we open the small hygiene packs we got at the administration tent, we find we've been given toothbrushes and soap to wash with. After we've brushed our teeth at the nearby shower block and used the stinky portable toilets, Mami settles Panny down to sleep and kisses us both goodnight. "Everything will look better tomorrow, I promise," she tells Pan although she's looking at me as she says it. I give her the best smile I can manage, closing my eyes and pretending to sleep. I keep my ears open, though, straining to hear what she's whispering to Dada when they both go outside our tent. The things the kids from Regland said are going round and round my head, making me question everything I thought I knew. No matter how many times I tell myself they must have a good reason, I can't help feeling angry that our parents are lying to us.

"Alina?" a small voice says in the dark. I turn over. Pan's looking at me with wide eyes, a big tear dripping down her cheek. "Do teddy bears go to heaven?" It's the first thing she's said to anyone since we left the boat. I was starting to

worry she'd get lost inside her head and never speak to us again.

I reach out and take her hand, wrapping my fingers around hers and brushing away her tears with a corner of my blanket. "Bam-Bear isn't in heaven, silly," I tell her.

"Why not?" Pan's chin wobbles. "He wasn't a bad teddy, was he?"

"No, of course not. He's not in heaven, because teddy bears can't drown. Didn't you know that?"

Pan shakes her head, her eyes growing even wider.

"And he didn't fall in the water," I say, trying to weave a clever story just like Dada. "He jumped. Do you know why?"

"Because he didn't want to come to this place?" Pan asks. It's a good guess and it's probably much closer to the truth than my version, but I keep going anyway.

"No, it's because he always wanted to be a

deep-sea diver. He used to go swimming in the lake at night when you were asleep. Now that he's explored every bit of it, he wants a bigger adventure." I know I'm getting better at this, as it sounds just like something Dada would say. I smile at her, trying to convince her the story's true. "He was so excited when he saw the open sea that he couldn't help diving straight in. Right now, he's swimming down there with rainbow-coloured fish and playing hide-and-seek with dolphins. Tonight, he'll sleep on a soft bed of seaweed. Tomorrow, he'll go and explore the coral castles the crab people have built on the ocean floor."

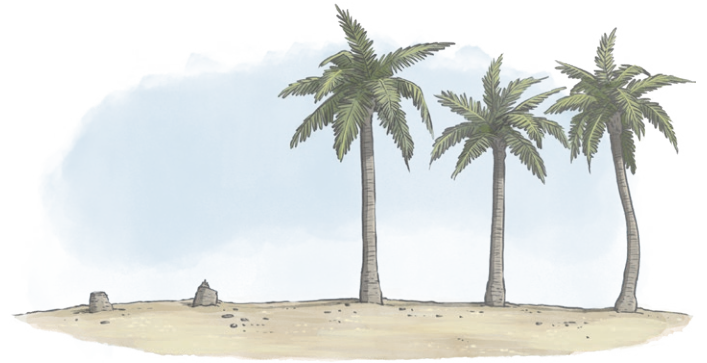
"So... he's not sad?" Pan asks hopefully.

"Bam-Bear is happier than he's ever been in his whole life, I promise." As soon as the words are out, I know why Mami and Dada have been lying to us about the refugee camp. They don't want us worrying and being sad and so they tell us what we want to hear, hoping that we'll believe them – just like I'm doing with Panny, right now.

She wipes her face with her blanket and then

shuffles onto my mattress, snuggling up next to me and going to sleep with her head on my shoulder. Gil's shifted in his sleep until his feet are all tangled up with mine. Even though it's hot and uncomfortable with Pan's breath warming up my cheek, I lie there, still as I can be, until I finally start to drift off myself. I don't care how hot and uncomfortable this new place is going to be. I don't care how long we have to stay, either. As long as I have my family with me, that's all that matters.

CHAPTER THREE



Dada said we'd stay here for ten days at most. We've been here for nearly two weeks now. I'm starting to think we'll never get permission to go to the mainland.

A couple of families who were in the dinghy with us have already left. We heard they were taken to the small airport and flown by plane to Dorrica. The parents of the twin girls I shared my last cereal bar with before we crossed the sea both worked in well-paid jobs for their country's government. The other family has cousins who are citizens of Dorrica. Because my family didn't earn much back home and we don't know anyone in Dorrica, we have to wait

here for as long as it takes for the government to decide if they can afford to help us. Dada says that depends on whether or not they think we deserve any help.

I don't know what we'll do if they decide that we don't.

I still feel lucky, though. There are lots of people who have had to leave relatives behind when they left their countries and others whose families got split up along the way. There are even kids not much older than me who are here all by themselves. I don't ask them questions about where their friends and families are – it makes them too sad.

At least Pan and Gil have something to keep them busy. The Dorrican Refugee Charity has set up a small school in one of the tents, which they've been going to every day. Since it's only for children up to eight years old and they don't have any proper teachers, the kids mostly spend their time singing songs and drawing pictures. At least it takes their mind off the war we fled from and the long wait at the camp. There's nothing for older kids like me, Tolia and Eddis

to do, though. We just sit outside our tents talking or help our parents queue for the things we need every day.

The queues are endless.

More people arrive in boats on the beach all the time. The camp doesn't have enough food for everyone, even though they keep handing out ration books. The portions in the plastic boxes have been getting smaller, which is really worrying. Last night, they ran out of food before Dada and I got to the front of the queue. We went to bed hungry and Gil kept us awake half the night with his crying. There are some people in the camp who have set up shops in their tents selling food and drink at higher prices than the local town. We can't afford to buy anything from them, though, as we spent all our money on the journey here. Dada's going into town today to see if he can find work. Since he only speaks a little bit of Dorrican, I've persuaded him to let me come with him to translate.

"Are you sure it's safe?" Mami frets as we pack our last water bottle and this morning's bread ration into a small bag. "I heard a group of

refugees from Regland had stones thrown at them by locals when they went down to the harbour yesterday.”

Mami’s been working with the Dorrican Refugee Charity as a translator, helping all the new people fill in their application forms and keeping everyone up to date with the camp news. Dada’s annoyed that she’s working so hard for them without getting paid for anything she does. It makes her feel useful, though. Not like Dada. Sitting around all day with nothing to do until it’s time to queue for food and water has made him tired and grumpy. Today’s the first time I’ve seen him look hopeful since we arrived.

“That lot from Regland were probably trying to sneak onto boats to the mainland,” Dada says, lacing up his worn boots. “They’re giving the *real* refugees here a bad name and turning the locals against us. More of them turn up every day – there’s not enough food here as it is.”

“But they don’t have *any* food in their own country,” I say, remembering all the things that Tolia and Eddis have told me about Regland. Life in their village sounded even worse than

the refugee camp.

“Yes, but their country’s not at war, is it?” Dada says grumpily. “They can grow food or work hard and pay other countries to send them food instead of just leaving. You’re too young to remember all the asylum seekers from Regland coming to Lapagonia five years ago, Alina. There weren’t enough houses or jobs for them and it made local people really angry. That’s what happens when lots of economic migrants move to another country.”

I bite my tongue before I tell him about the crop failures and droughts and floods. Dada’s a grown-up who’s seen the news and read all the papers. He knows more about it than I do.

“Anyway, the town centre here in Trigos is perfectly safe. We won’t stay out too long – we’ll be back before they lock the gates, so don’t worry, Korsten, OK?”

Mami looks like she’s biting her tongue as well. She doesn’t say anything; she just gives us both a kiss and lets us go. My heart nearly jumps for joy when we get our pass book stamped

at the gates and set off down the road to the town centre. Without this special book giving our family permission to leave the camp, we'd be stuck in the tent city all day. I'm so glad we've got one I can't help smiling, even though the guards make me nervous. When we leave the barbed wire fence behind and head down the hill towards the coast, I can feel the sea breeze ruffle my hair, cooling my hot skin and filling me with fresh hope. I hadn't realised just how trapped I was feeling until now. It's like I've been released from a cage and I can finally breathe again.

The feeling doesn't last.

When we get down to the main road, a big truck roars past, making me jump in fright and grab hold of Dada's hand. "It's OK, Alina," he says, giving my hand a squeeze. "It's just a delivery truck."

He knows what I'm thinking, because the noise makes us both remember the same thing. An image of army vehicles flashes through my head, the roar of their engines breaking the afternoon calm. Soldiers spill out onto the street, waving guns and shouting orders at us in a language we don't understand. The memory makes me shudder despite the heat. My T-shirt is sticking to my back and we're not even halfway to town yet. We're so thirsty we've already drunk half of



the water in our small bottle. I watch enviously as local people pass by in air-conditioned buses, wishing we had money to pay for a ticket into town. If this is what spring on Trigos is like, I'm not sure I'll make it through a Dorrican summer without melting.

When we finally get to town, we have a rest under a tree, eating a few bites of our small loaf and drinking the last of the water before we get to work. From where we're sitting, on a slope by the side of the road that overlooks the first row of shops, I can see right across the other side of the island. It's bigger than I was expecting and prettier than I'd hoped. The buildings along the seafront are all painted in pastel colours; Dada tells me that those are the hotels that bring tourists flocking from the mainland in the summer. There are beautiful villas with big gardens built all the way up the hillside, tropical flowers peeking over their high walls. On the other side of town, the harbour is humming with activity, motorboats coming and going with nets full of freshly caught fish.

I'm enjoying the view right up until Dada says it's time to go. That's when I start feeling

nervous again. Some of the local people passing by have given us suspicious looks, staring at our sunburnt skin and second-hand clothes. One of them even rolled their eyes at Dada when he tried saying 'hello' in Dorrican. Because of our different hair and eye colour, people know straight away we're from the refugee camp. I'm not sure we'll be welcome in the shops and pastel-painted buildings.

The first place we try is a mechanic's yard. Dada's good at fixing engines – he worked at a car repair business back in Lapagonia. As soon as we walk through the gates, the men in the yard stop what they're doing, frowning at us and muttering under their breath. Dada gives my shoulder a squeeze, trying to encourage me. Even though my palms are sweaty and my heart is racing, I know I have to be brave and help him speak to these unfriendly men.

Before I can open my mouth, the man who's clearly the boss comes out of the office and waves us away. "No begging here. This is a business, not a charity."

"We're not begging – my father's looking for

work,” I tell him. My throat is so dry that my words come out barely louder than a whisper. The man hears them, though, and that just makes him even grumpier.

“We don’t employ illegals here. Go back to your own country and find work there, instead of sponging off our taxpayers.”

I don’t know what that means, as I thought ‘sponging’ was something you only did in the bath. Dada’s a grown-up and so he understands. Although he doesn’t know much Dorrican, he can read the expression on the man’s face clearly.

“Come on, Alina,” he says, taking my hand. “Let’s try somewhere else.”

But it’s the same story at every repair business we try. Some of the bosses look angry and some are friendly and suggest other places we could ask. Whether they frown or smile, none of them want to give Dada a job. Eventually, we do see some refugees washing shop windows and painting a fence and so we hurry over to ask them how they got work. That turns into

another disappointment, as we find we don’t have a language in common and their Dorrican is worse than Dada’s.

“Maybe we should ask in the shops for work instead,” I suggest. “They might let you do some odd jobs.”

Dada doesn’t look happy – he wants to repair engines, not sweep floors. We really need the money, though, so we try some of the shops anyway. The woman in the first shop pretends she can’t understand anything I’m saying even though my Dorrican’s really good. Then, the man in the second just points to a sign saying ‘No illegal immigrants allowed in this store’. That makes me angry. I want to tell him that it’s not illegal to run away from war or ask other people for help. I’m too scared to say anything like that, though. I’m so thirsty that my head is starting to hurt and it’s making it hard for me to think straight.

By the time we try the third shop, I feel like crying. The woman behind the counter must’ve noticed how tired and upset I am, as she tells us to sit down under her fan and gives us bottles



of water and a packet of biscuits for free. I'm so grateful she's being nice that I burst into tears – that brings her husband hurrying from the back of the shop to find out what's going on. He's nice too. They tell us that their names are Mr and Mrs Papidos and that their family has owned a store on the island for over a hundred years. They say there's not as much work on the island as there used to be – that's why a lot of the young people have moved to Dorrica. Their own son and daughter have left and so now, it's just the two of them running the shop on their own.

"That's why some of the locals are a bit unfriendly to newcomers," Mrs Papidos says, patting my hand kindly. "They're not bad people – they're just scared that refugees willing to accept low pay will take the few jobs that are left. If that happens, there'll be no jobs for their own families and then their sons and daughters will leave for Dorrica too."

I pretend to understand, even though I don't know why a big town like this doesn't have lots of work for everyone who wants it. When I translate for Dada, he nods like he gets what they're talking about. It must be another one of those grown-up things that I'll understand when I'm older.

"There are plenty of people here who want to help the refugees, though," Mrs Papidos tells us. "My neighbour and some of her family work for the Dorrican Refugee Charity here on Trigós. Some of the other islanders have set up a group at the community centre to collect donations of clothes and food to take to the camp each week. You will find someone willing to offer you work if you keep trying." She smiles at Dada encouragingly.

“Have you tried the boatyard?” Mr Papidos asks. “You won’t be welcome down at the harbour – the police are suspicious of anyone from the camp going near the ferry. But Jaff Kepoy has a repair shop nearby and he might be able to find you something to do, even if it’s only for a few afternoons a week.”

When I translate this for Dada, his face lights up. He loves repairing boats. Back in Lapagonia, we used to have a little speedboat for trips across the lake. He’d spend hours in the garage tinkering with the engine to make it sing and polishing the wood till it shone.

We get up to go, thanking Mr and Mrs Papidos for being so kind. Just as we’re stepping out of the door, they smile at me and slip a bottle of juice and another packet of biscuits into our bag. They make sure Dada isn’t looking, as they can tell he’s too proud to take more things we haven’t paid for. I grin back at them when I think of Pan and Gil eating biscuits and drinking juice – it’s a smile of delight that even the scowls of the people working down by the harbour can’t take off my face as we head to Jaff Kepoy’s boatyard.

CHAPTER FOUR



I’m nervous about talking to the boatyard owner, right up until we walk through the gates and I see who Jaff Kepoy is. I know, straight away, that he’s not like the other mechanics who turned us away and that he’s not going to say nasty things about us being in his country.

Jaff Kepoy is the man who saved Dada from drowning.

He’s leaning over a big engine, which looks like it comes from one of the coastguards’ patrol boats. When he sees us walking across the yard, he smiles at us instead of frowning.



"Hello," he says. "I'm glad you've recovered from your difficult journey. Do you speak Dorrican?"

His smile gets wider when I tell him that I can, explaining that Dada can understand too if Jaff speaks slowly and uses simple words. When Dada thanks Jaff for pulling him from the sea, Jaff shakes his hand and asks if he's looking for work. I help Dada translate all the things he can do with engines, telling Jaff about the work he used to do in Lapagonia. Jaff invites Dada to come and look at a boat that needs to be repaired, taking us across the beach to a little jetty where he keeps the fishing boat he

was driving when we first saw him. I help Jaff translate some more words for Dada, pointing out the places that Jaff says need to be repaired. But by the time they've unpacked Jaff's toolbox and got to work stripping down the engine, I'm not really needed any more. I sit watching them for a while until the sun starts to burn the back of my neck and then I go looking for some shade.

A lot of the trees along the beach have been cut down, leaving only stumps. I find a small palm tree to sit under while I wait, wishing my belly would stop rumbling. All I've had to eat today is a bit of bread and half a packet of biscuits. Trying to distract myself from the other packet that I want to keep for Pan and Gil, I look at the scenery instead. Even though the sunlight dancing on the waves takes my mind off my hunger, it makes me feel bad in a different way. Every time I look at the water, it's not the ocean I see but the lake beside our cabin in Lapagonia.

We lived at the edge of a small town with one main road, a five-roomed school and a cluster of shops where we could buy everything we needed. We knew everyone's names back home. My best

friend, Lissal, lived in the house just across the road. At night, we used to pass messages to each other from our bedroom windows using our torches. We could've used our phones or the Internet but that would've taken all the fun out of it. When our parents were asleep, we'd pretend we were secret agents, sending our top-secret messages and practising using the special code we'd invented.

Lissal knew all of my favourite things and all of the stuff I'd never told anyone else. She used to say that we were really sisters from another planet, only we accidentally got born into different families when we were sent to this one. She used to say lots of wild things like that to make me laugh. She had the best imagination of anyone I've ever met.

When the soldiers came, Lissal's family were taken away in the trucks. Dada said it was because her parents came from the same country as the invaders and that they wanted all of their citizens to join the army. Her parents hadn't been back there since they were children – and Lissal doesn't even speak that language. I don't know why where you're born is more important

than where you choose to live and raise your family. And I don't know what happened to Lissal and her parents. I try not to think about it. It makes me too sad.

The light shimmers on the water again and I look away, tears stinging my eyes.

Even though we're in a different country, far, far away from Lapagonia, everything here reminds me of home. There's a house on the hill by the beach. Although its garden is full of tropical flowers instead of daffodils and its walls are pastel blue instead of log brown like ours, it still makes me think of our cabin by the lake. Maybe it's because the fence around it is painted green, just like ours was. Or maybe it's because there's a barbecue grill in the backyard that reminds me of all the times we used to cook fish from the lake, the charcoal glowing red on crisp autumn evenings.

I don't know if our house is still there or if it's been destroyed by the war.

There were bombs falling when we ran from our log cabin and down the main road, and Dada

told me not to look back. That's when I heard the biggest explosion of all, so close it made my ears ring. It's so peaceful here on the beach in Trigós that it makes the memories in my head sound even louder.

It's not bombs I hear now, though. It's a dog barking.

When I look back at the house on the hill, I see a streak of grey and white dashing down the garden path, through the open gate and racing for the beach.

"Misty?" I gasp.

I thought my dog was back in Lapagonia, as we had to leave her behind with an old man when we reached the capital city. Dada said they wouldn't allow us to bring a dog over the border because other countries didn't want foreign animals there in case they brought diseases. In the end, though, we weren't allowed over the border either. The way the border guards shouted at us and waved their guns, they must have thought we were going to bring diseases into their country too.

But Misty isn't in Lapagonia – she's right here, running to greet me. When she gets right up close and licks my hand, my heart sinks to the bottom of my worn-out shoes. This isn't Misty. It's someone else's dog.

I swallow the lump in my throat and stroke her soft ears anyway. She rubs her head against my chest the same way Misty used to do when she was looking for attention, which makes me smile, even though the memory makes me feel sad at the same time. I'm just looking around for a stick to play fetch with her, when a loud shout comes from halfway up the hill.

"Hey! Leave my dog alone!"

That's when I see a boy stomping towards me. He's got a bright yellow T-shirt on over a pair of green shorts, his hands jammed angrily into the pockets as he marches down the hill. When he gets closer, I see he's got black, curly hair and I realise that I've seen his scowling, brown eyes before. My heart sinks when I recognise him as the boy from the boat who was shouting at us when we arrived. We're not in different boats now – we're on the same beach. This time, he

might not stop at shouting.

I pretend to bend down to give his dog one last pat, secretly picking up a stone and holding it behind my back, just in case.

He stops a short distance away, looking me up and down like he's half afraid of me, too. "Flicker, come here," he says. His dog can hear the anger in his voice; she looks up at me and then back at him as though wondering what she's done wrong. "Flicker, come!" He takes a biscuit out of his pocket and waves it at her. The dog makes up her mind straight away. When she bounces back to him, he puts a hand on her collar to make sure she doesn't run off again.

"You shouldn't be here."

At first, I think he's still talking to his dog. Then, I realise he's looking at me. "It's not your beach – it belongs to everyone," I say, hoping that it's true.

"It doesn't belong to *you*. You're not from here," he shoots back at me like we're having a war of words. "You people keep coming here,



taking our jobs and cutting down our trees and messing things up for everyone. Look at what you've done!"

He points at the line of trees that have been chopped down along the beach. I swallow hard, wondering why he's blaming the refugees for that. Then, I remember what Tolia and Eddis told me about some of the refugees lighting cooking fires on the beach since we're not allowed to use fire in the camp. There's a group of men from Regland who catch fish and grill them down here, selling them to the other refugees for a small amount when they come back in the evening. Precious food like that is what Dada's trying to earn money to buy. I'm about to tell the boy that people are just hungry, when he says, "You people are the reason the tourists aren't coming in summer any more. It's your crime and dirty camp that scare them away. You should go back to your own country instead of ruining mine."

It's my turn to scowl. "You think I don't want to go home instead of being stuck in this horrible place where it's too hot and everyone's being mean to my family?" I snap, clutching the stone

even tighter and wishing my hands weren't trembling so hard. "I'd go home right now if I could. But there are soldiers everywhere and bombs falling – it isn't safe."

The boy opens his mouth and then closes it again like he doesn't have an answer for that. Even though I'm scared, I use the chance to tell him exactly what I think of him.

"You nearly killed my father with your boat!" I yell at him. "We're just trying to escape from a war someone else started. Instead of helping, *you're* trying to kill people, too! You're just as bad as the soldiers who took my home and my friends and my whole life from me!"

The lump is back in my throat – only now, it's ten times bigger, stopping me from saying anything else. I don't need any more bullet words, though. The ones I've fired off have stopped the boy from saying anything else. He stands there blinking at me like I'm the one who's hurt him. For a moment, I almost feel like apologising. Before I can make that mistake, I hear two people crunching over the sand behind me. I look round to see Dada and Jaff Kepoy

coming to join us.

Flicker whines and pulls away from the boy, running up to Jaff and dancing in excited circles round him. It's clear they know each other well. When I look at Jaff's eyes, I realise why. His eyes are a mirror image of the boy's, only Jaff's are smiling instead of glaring. "Are you making friends with my nephew?" he asks me kindly.

"She's not my friend – she's an illegal," the boy mutters under his breath so only I can hear. Before his uncle can say anything else, he takes another couple of biscuits from his pocket and waves them at his dog before running back up the hill. Flicker hesitates, looking at Jaff and then back at the disappearing biscuits, before deciding she wants the treats more. When she races after the boy, he closes the gate behind her so she won't come back to us after she's eaten them.

"Sorry about him," Jaff apologises. "Nico's a good boy – but his father and brothers have been saying some pretty bad stuff about refugees recently. Unfortunately, Nico's been copying them."

"Were they the ones in the motorboat with him?" I ask.

Jaff nods. "People here are worried that there won't be as many tourists this year. A lot of people on the island are struggling financially; without the money the tourists bring, some of the hotels and local businesses might have to close for good. But if the camp's putting people off coming, then it's the government's fault for not processing the asylum claims faster."

I smile at that. At least there are some people here who don't blame the refugees for everything. Dada can't follow what we're saying in Dorrican and he asks what we're talking about. I don't want to tell him in case it takes away the first smile that's been on his face for ages and so I just say I was telling Jaff about Misty and how much Flicker looks like her. Dada tells me that Jaff's given him a job at the boatyard three days a week and that he can start tomorrow. He looks so happy as we say goodbye to Jaff and walk back to the camp that I almost forget all about the unfriendly boy and his mean words. Instead, I grin at the thought of the packet of biscuits and bottle of juice in my bag. Tonight,

I can give them to Pan and Gil to celebrate the fact that something's finally gone right for my family.

CHAPTER FIVE



The next time I see Nico, there's almost another accident. Except, this time, it's not his fault.

The morning starts out badly. Dada's been earning money at the boatyard for the last few weeks and so we haven't been going to bed as hungry, which is a relief. But Pan's been having nightmares about the war and waking up crying every night. Without Bam-Bear to comfort her, she's been getting more distressed with each passing day.

"When's Bam-Bear coming home?" she wails at me as I'm trying to wash our single change of clothes in a bucket that's only a quarter full.

Water's scarce in the camp and there have been fights at the water tank. Having spent an hour in a queue just to get a dribble of water in our bucket, I'm already in a bad mood.



"He's having too much fun in the sea world," I sigh. "It's better that he's happy down there than miserable in here, isn't it?"

"But we're leaving soon!" Pan sniffs. "How will he find us if we go to Dorrica without him?"

"We'll be stuck in this camp for ages yet," I say without thinking. "Maybe for ever. The mainland doesn't want people like us." I realise I've said something I shouldn't when I look up and see that Pan's eyes are as wide as dinner plates.

"For *ever*?" she gasps. "You mean... we're never going to leave here?"

"Don't worry – we'll be leaving soon," Mami says, coming out of our tent carrying Gil. "We just need to be patient a little longer." She shoots me a warning look and I keep my mouth shut. She knows, now, that I don't believe their fairy tales about a happy ending in Dorrica any more than I believe the stories I've been telling Pan about Bam-Bear. I slosh the wet T-shirt in my bucket around too hard and spill precious water onto the ground, where it's instantly sucked up by the parched soil. That makes me frown even harder. I'm sick of never having enough of the basic things just as much as I'm sick of pretending this is all a big, fun adventure for the sake of Pan and Gil.

"Gil's not a baby," I say out loud without meaning to. "You shouldn't be carrying him

everywhere.” I think there’s a little part of me that’s jealous he gets to ride around the camp in Mami’s arms and play all day while I have to do grown-up things like washing and standing in food queues.

Just as I say that, Dada comes out of the tent looking tired and grumpy. He got to bed really late as he was helping some of the other refugees patrol the camp to stop the thieves who’ve been breaking into the supply tents to steal food and water at night. Then, he was kept up by Pan crying for Bam-Bear until morning and so he’s hardly had any sleep. Now, he has to go to work all day to earn some money for us.

“Alina’s right,” Dada says, rubbing his puffy eyes. “You’re babying him, Korsten. Gil needs to do things for himself or he’ll never grow up.”

Mami looks upset at being told off by both of us and so she tries to set Gil down to walk beside her to the school tent. As soon as his feet touch the ground, he starts crying at the top of his lungs. I instantly feel bad. Mami looks back at Dada and me helplessly, almost as though she’s asking for permission to pick him back up

again. This time, it’s Dada who hurries over to comfort him.

“Hey, it’s OK,” he says, lifting Gil up onto his shoulder. “It’s safe here. You don’t need to worry about the war or the soldiers any more.” He puts his other arm around Mami’s waist so she knows she’s safe, too, and Pan runs over to cling to Mami and Dada’s legs. I hesitate for only a moment before joining the group hug, getting soapy bubbles over everyone with my wet hands.

For a minute, it really is like we’re camping in the Altic Forest instead of stuck in this refugee camp. Last summer, we’d do a group hug before Pan and Gil got into their sleeping bags so that they wouldn’t be afraid of the shadows the tree branches made on the tent walls or the sounds of animals in the night. Even though we’ve got bigger things to worry about now, the family hug makes everything feel a bit better, just like it did back then.

“Why don’t I buy some grilled fish and fried plantain for supper tonight, as a treat?” Dada says, earning cheers from Pan and me and a big

grin from Gil. "You can invite your friends from Regland, Alina," he adds. "We'll have a little picnic in our tent."

That makes me smile too. Since Eddis and Tolia's parents haven't been able to get work outside the camp, they've got nothing but the small food rations to live on.

Mami looks much happier now that we've all stopped quarrelling and made up again. Gil even agrees to walk to the school tent with Mami holding one hand and Pan holding the other.

"Alina, will you come to the boatyard and help me with some translation today?" Dada asks as I'm wringing out the clothes and pegging them to dry on the line strung up behind our row of tents. "Jaff's gone to the mainland for parts and he's left his head mechanic in charge. He speaks too fast and I don't understand what he's saying. I don't want to get any of his instructions wrong."

Dada's mentioned the man before; it doesn't sound as if he likes refugees much. I know why Dada's worried about working with him

without Jaff there.

I can't wait to get out of the camp again. I've been spending all of my spare time helping out at the school tent for something to do. If I have to sit and watch Pan sadly drawing one more picture of Bam-Bear deep-sea diving without her, I think I'm going to scream.

The walk to town's a bit easier this morning as there are more clouds today and the sun doesn't burn my skin so much. When we pass by the beach, I see that the tree I sat under last time's been chopped down, leaving only a stump. There's a group of men from Regland setting up a small cooking fire on the sand, blowing on the small sticks to get the flames going before they put the bigger logs on. They come here instead of cutting trees down near the camp as the guards have warned them they'll go to prison if they start a forest fire up on the dry hill. When I think back to what Nico said about refugees ruining the island for the locals, I feel guilty. Then, I remember the grilled fish and fried plantain we'll be buying for our picnic tonight and my mouth starts watering instead.

The head mechanic at the boatyard is surprised to see me with Dada. When he realises I can speak Dorrican, he's a lot more polite than I think he usually is to my father. After I help explain the work on two motorboats that are sitting on wheels in the yard, the head mechanic lets me sit in the office and watch TV until it's time to translate for him again. First, I watch a show about cooking that makes me hungry, as even though Dada buys food for us to add to the small boxes we get at the camp, I give a lot of it to Tolia and Eddis. Their mum and dad were caught cutting down tree branches just outside our camp last winter for firewood to help everyone keep warm. Because the guards took away their pass books as punishment, now they can't get work or buy food.

Then, I watch a travel programme all about Dorrica and its islands. That makes me homesick. Dorrica's so different from Lapagonia I don't think I'll get used to it, even if we do get permission to live on the mainland. The cities there are full of skyscrapers and busy shops, with so many people walking down the streets that it makes me dizzy just watching them. The roads look like rivers of traffic rushing along

with fast cars all honking their horns at once and motorcycles weaving in and out between the lorries.

I'm just about to switch to a different channel when the presenter starts talking about the university in the capital city. They show a view of the new medical building, its huge glass windows looking down on a garden full of flowers. The presenter says that because Dorrica needs to train more doctors, there will be more places for students to study over the coming years. That makes me lean forwards, really interested now. I've always wanted to be a doctor, ever since I was little. When I got a toy medical kit for my eighth birthday, I spent the whole day pretending Pan was my patient, taking her pulse and giving her sweets instead of medicine. Living in that strange, new city would be worth it if I could go back to school and have a chance to become a doctor like I've always dreamed.

Before the programme finishes, the head mechanic calls me to do some more translation. After I explain to Dada what needs to be done next, he asks me to go to the beach to buy some

fish and plantain for tonight's supper. Since the head mechanic's keeping him hard at work, he's worried if he leaves it too late, the men with the cooking fire will have gone back to the camp. There are so many people there looking for food that it will get sold long before Dada's work finishes.

I take the money Dada gives me and head across the beach. The men from Regland are just finishing up frying the last of the fish. If I don't hurry, they'll have kicked sand across their fire to put it out and packed their fish and plantain into pots to carry back to camp before

I get there. I wave to let them know to wait for me, and they wave back and keep the fire going until I arrive. Even though the guards don't allow fires in the camp, they don't mind people bringing cooked food back in. More food means less arguing, which means less fighting for them to deal with.

The men are nice to me when they see I haven't come begging and I've brought money. When they hear I can speak some Reggish, they give me one of their biggest fish and put a big helping of fried plantain in my plastic bag. I'm



just waving to them as they walk back to the road when something else catches my eye.

A dog is running across the sand towards me, its tongue out and its tail wagging.

“Hi, Flicker,” I call, keeping my bag of food out of reach as I give her a pat. I’m really happy to see her, until I remember she won’t be alone. Sure enough, when I turn round, there’s Nico frowning at me again. I’m guessing he’s going to say something nasty but he doesn’t and just pulls a ball out of his pocket instead. As soon as he’s thrown it high in the air, Flicker dashes after it and I can see where she gets her name from. She’s so fast the ball doesn’t even have time to bounce before she catches it and brings it straight back to Nico.

I watch them playing fetch for a while, smiling sadly when I remember how bad Misty used to be at the game. She loved chasing a ball through the fields behind our town. She was really clumsy, though – she always tripped over her feet and went tumbling over the ground trying to pick it up. It’s another confusing memory that makes me happy and sad at the same time.

I sigh and head across the grass to the main road, avoiding the hot sand that makes my feet sweat in my old shoes. Walking slowly back to the boatyard, I watch the trucks instead as they rumble past on their way to and from the harbour.

That’s when I see the ball rolling past my feet and disappearing under the wheels of the trucks. Nico must have thrown it poorly; the road’s too busy to try to get it back.

Flicker doesn’t know that, though.

“Flicker! No, leave it! Flicker!” I hear Nico’s frightened voice shouting in the distance as a streak of grey and white comes dashing across the grass to fetch the ball. There’s another huge truck heading our way, ignoring the speed limit and going far too fast. All Flicker sees is the ball. She’s about to run right in front of it.

Time seems to slow down again, just like it did when Dada fell in the water and I was scared he was going to drown. Nico is yelling and yelling, and the truck is roaring and roaring, and Flicker is running and running...

I rush forwards and grab Flicker's collar, pulling her back just as a truck thunders past, the driver honking his horn and yelling at me to watch out. Time goes back to normal as Nico comes running up, breathless and shaking.

"Thank you," he says, looking at me like he's really seeing me for the first time. "That was amazing!"

I'm so shaken up I forget that he was frowning at me just a minute before. I grin at him in relief as we both pat Flicker and stroke her ears. "I used to have a dog just like her," I tell him. "She was called Misty. She wasn't as good at catching a ball as Flicker, though. But she was a big, friendly teddy bear who licked me half to death when I came home from school."

I'm not sure why I'm telling Nico that. He laughs anyway like he thinks it's funny and I laugh too. Then, his smile fades. "What happened to her?" he asks. "Did she...?"

I know what he's asking and so I shake my head. "We had to leave her behind. We couldn't take her with us – they don't let dogs across

the border."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Nico says. The frown on his face tells me he really means it. Then, his frown of concern changes back to a scowl when he sees Flicker sniffing at the bag I'm holding. "What's in there?" he demands.

"It's fish and fried plantain. I'm taking it back for supper tonight."

"Fish and fried plantain?" Nico looks from me to the last palm tree that's been cut down and back at me again. "You're helping them spoil our beach! It was beautiful before you all came here. Now, look at it!"

"But your nasty government is starving the refugees!" I snap back. "They wouldn't be cutting trees down to cook food if there was enough in the camp!"

"Our government wouldn't have to feed all the refugees if you didn't come here in the first place!" Nico yells right back at me.

"You don't get it. And you clearly never will!"

That's it. I'm not talking to this boy *ever* again.

I give an angry snort and turn away, marching to the boatyard without a backward glance. A little part of me does feel bad about the trees and the scorched sand all along the beach. But that's the part I'm never, ever going to let *him* see.

CHAPTER SIX



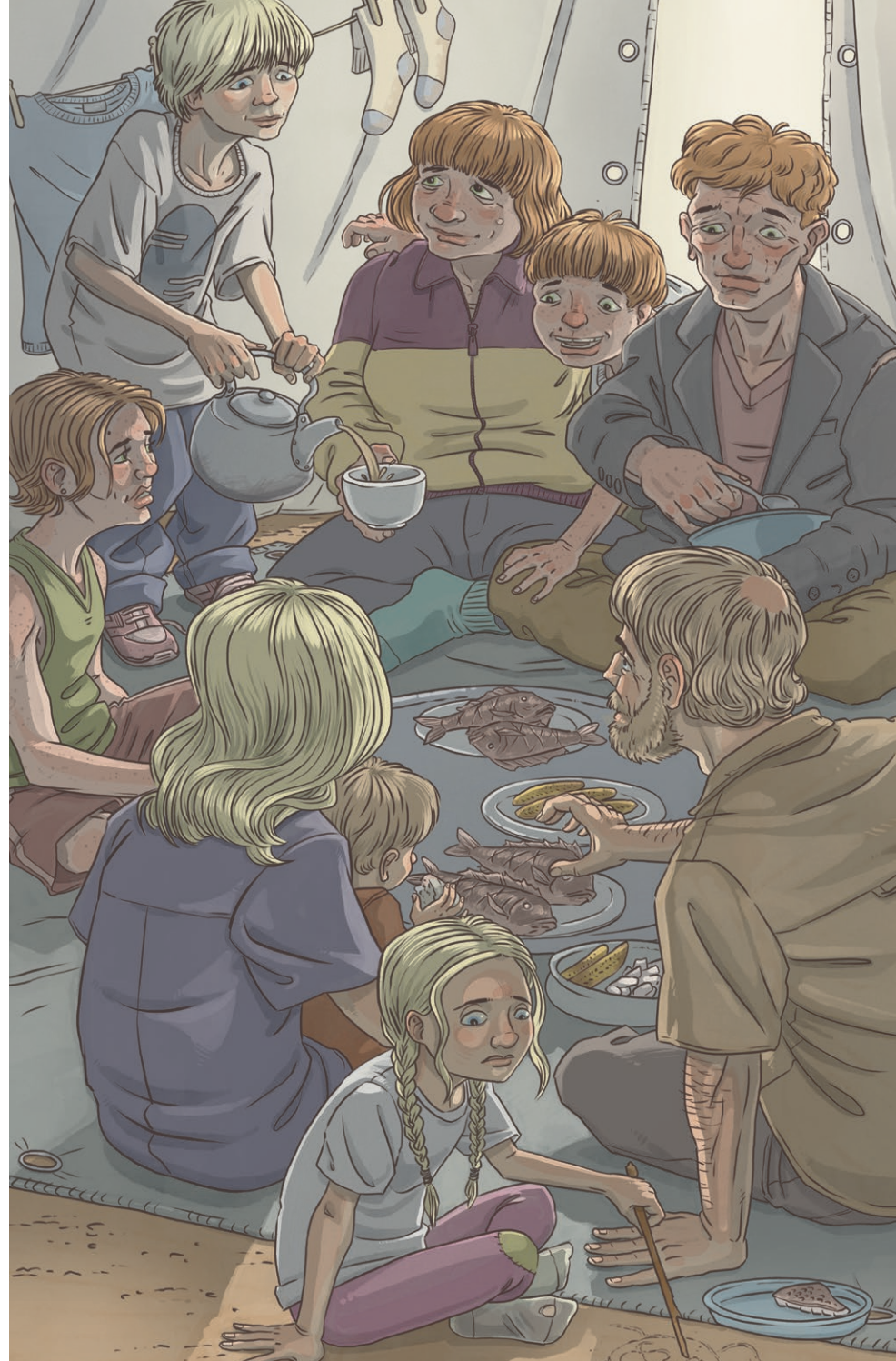
Life in the refugee camp is getting worse – even our family picnics aren't fun any more.

The first one was great. Eddis and Tolia brought their mum and dad and we all sat inside our tent, sharing out the food from our small ration boxes and eating the grilled fish and fried plantain I'd bought on the beach. When Mami and I helped translate their stories about how hard the Stanton family's life had been in Regland, I was really glad to see that Dada finally understood why so many people from Regland were here in the camp and that they're real refugees too. They told us funny stories, like the time Eddis got his boots stuck in the wet sand when they

went hunting for crabs on the Regland shore. Five people were trying to pull him out, until his mother suggested that they could just lift him out of his boots instead of pulling his boots from the sand. We all laughed at that, telling them our own stories about Lapagonia and the fun times we had in our small town.

The next time we had a picnic, Eddis and Tolia's parents invited four of their friends. Dada wasn't too happy as they hadn't asked us first. Their mother explained that since their friends also had their pass books confiscated for bringing firewood into the camp last winter, they didn't have any other food either. We made the best of it, sharing out smaller portions of food and getting to know the new people who crowded into our tent.

The next night, nine more people showed up to join us. The food tent had run out of rations before they got to the front of the queue, leaving lots of people hungry. They must've heard from the other Reggish refugees that we had extra food to share out, as they came to our tent asking us to feed them instead. Dada and Mami felt bad about turning the adults away



and giving just a small portion to their three children, even though that's all we had left. The adults stood around our tent grumbling about how selfish we were until Dada ended up in an argument with them about having his own children to feed.

Now, there are people coming to our tent every night to ask for something to eat. Although Dada spends all of the money he earns on food to bring back from town, it's never enough. Our tent used to be the one place we felt safe at night. Now, it feels like it's just another war zone, with angry words falling outside instead of bombs and with fists flying instead of bullets when people fight over food.

It's the same story all over the camp. Everyone's arguing over the limited supplies, afraid they'll be left hungry and thirsty and their children will go to bed crying. Instead of helping, the guards just stand back and watch when a fight breaks out. The Dorrican Refugee Charity workers can't do much except fill in forms that never seem to go anywhere, run their small school and hand out ration cards to more and more new arrivals. The guards have stopped giving

out pass books to them, as they say there are too many people going into town looking for work and begging and that's causing even more tension. It's like our camp is a tea kettle on a stove that's getting hotter and hotter; everyone in charge can hear the steam whistling out in warning but nobody's doing anything about it.

Gil's got so frightened he's refusing to leave our tent. Mami can't even coax him to school any more. I've been stuck inside our hot tent for days encouraging him to colour in and distracting him with stories while Mami does her translation work and Pan goes to school. This morning, I'm out of stories, paper and patience. If I don't get out of this stuffy tent and this awful camp, I'm going to explode.

"Alina, I've asked Mrs Stanton to look after Gil for us this afternoon," Mami says when she comes back at midday to check on us.

"What do you need me to do?" I ask, my heart sinking. While sitting in the tent might be boring, standing in queues in the hot sun getting burnt isn't much fun either. At least I don't have to wash clothes any more. Now that it's the

start of summer, the water ration is so low we can't afford to waste any on laundry. We're all hot and sweaty and our tent is starting to smell – there's nothing we can do about it, though.

"Can you come into town with me to bring your father some lunch? He hasn't taken any food with him – I don't want him working all day on an empty stomach," Mami says. "I can't go to the boatyard myself – I've got to go to the Refugee Charity office instead. A little girl arrived in one of the boats this morning without any parents; we're taking her to the main office so they can process her forms faster and put her with a foster family. They're hoping they can send her to a care home on the mainland in the next few days."

For a moment, I feel a flash of jealousy that the girl is getting out of here straight away when we've been stuck here for nearly two whole months. Then, I remember that she's lost her family and I feel really bad. I'd be willing to put up with this awful camp for my whole life if it was a choice between staying with my family or going to the mainland on my own.

I'm grateful for the chance to get out of the camp again. I climb into the back of the Refugee Charity car with Mami, smiling at the little girl so she won't be afraid of me. She's from a country even farther north than Lapagonia – Mami's the only one who can speak her language. She's not saying much, though. She just stares out of the window the whole time with wide eyes that look so lost and faraway they don't seem to notice any of the scenery.

The Refugee Charity office is in the main part of town, near the harbour. Even though I know it will be air-conditioned and cool inside, I can't bear the thought of more sitting about waiting while adults talk and forms are filled in. Instead, I ask Mami if I can paddle at the beach after I take Dada's lunch to the boatyard. After a bit of persuasion, she says it's OK.

I'm walking down the street when I see some police officers arguing with a group of refugees. There are two women and a man who have been washing windows and sweeping up hair at a beauty salon. I don't know what country they're from or how long they've been on Trigos. There's a woman in the group who speaks

Dorrigan – she’s translating for the others. I stop outside a clothes shop, pretending to look at the swimsuits in the window so I can listen to what they’re saying.

The police are demanding to see identification. When the refugees show their camp pass books, the police say that’s not enough. The refugees don’t have anything else to show them. Then, the police start shouting something about a theft at the harbour and telling the refugees they have to come to the station. They put handcuffs on the refugees and drive them away in their car without even bothering to tell the salon owner that they’re taking her workers away. When she comes out just as the police car is speeding off, I hear her telling one of her customers that she doesn’t want thieves in her shop and that she’s going to sack the refugees.

Nobody explained to the refugees what they were accused of or gave them a chance to tell their story. Everyone just assumed they were guilty because they were poor. I look down at my grubby T-shirt that hasn’t been washed in a week and my shoes that are falling apart. If the police see me, they might think I’m a thief too.

That makes me nervous; I keep my head down as I hurry to the boatyard, hoping no one will notice me.

I’m just passing the high fence to the half-open gate, when I see something happening over on the beach. I hesitate, torn between wanting to find out what’s going on and wanting to hide away in the office where no one can see me. There’s another team of police officers over there, arguing with a group of men from Regland who have lit their fire on the beach. If they’re not going to be allowed to cook there any more, then that’s something Dada needs to know about as the food in the shops is much more expensive.

There are no palm trees left to hide behind, as they’ve all been cut down. But there are some big rocks at the edge of the beach – I sneak behind one of them to watch.

The police officers aren’t just saying that cooking fires aren’t allowed. They’re also saying the refugees need a permit to catch fish and that they owe the Trigos Council money since they’ve been catching them illegally. The men from

Regland don't speak Dorrican and so they can't answer the officers' questions. That's making the police even angrier. I want to be brave and help them translate, like Mami does, but I'm too scared as the police officers' uniforms remind me of the soldiers that took over my country. In the end, the police take the refugees' pass books and throw them in the fire. Then, they push the men into the police cars and tell them they're being taken back to the camp.

I sit hunched behind the rock for a long while after the cars drive away, too afraid to get up even though I can feel the sweat trickling uncomfortably down my back. Every time I move, I think I can hear police sirens in the distance. When I finally gather my courage and look out from behind the rock again, I get another fright.

I'm not alone.

There's someone else hiding behind the rock next to mine. He looks even more scared than I do.

"Nico!" an angry voice shouts from the other side of the beach. "Nico! Where are you?"

"If you don't come here right now, you'll be in *big trouble!*" another voice yells, closer to our hiding place.

When Nico looks around, his eyes meet mine, opening wider in alarm. He puts his finger to his lips, begging me to be quiet. He doesn't need to ask. I've had one too many frights today – I don't want to attract the attention of any more angry people.



After a minute, Nico slowly pokes his head out of hiding to check if the coast is clear. That's when a hand grabs him by the T-shirt, pulling him out of his rock shelter. The second boy's been waiting. Now, there's no escape.

CHAPTER SEVEN



I hold my breath, peeking out from behind the rock and watching to see what will happen next.

“That’s where you are!” one of the boys says impatiently. “Didn’t you hear us calling?” He’s a much bigger, meaner version of Nico, about four years older and a whole head taller. Before Nico can answer, the other boy, who looks even older, comes running over, his eyes blazing as he reaches out to snatch the pad of paper Nico’s hiding behind his back.

“Is this what you’ve been doing instead of helping us with the fishing boats?” he growls. “Your babyish drawings?”

"They're not babyish," Nico mutters, his eyes lowered. "And you're not fishing today – so I'm not shirking my chores."

"We'll decide when you're working and when you're not," the boy yells back, poking his finger in Nico's chest. "And you were meant to be in the boat today."

"I don't want to do that any more, Kestof," Nico says, even softer than before.

"What?" The two boys glare at him, their eyes narrowing. I suddenly realise where I've seen those faces before. The boys were in the motorboat with Nico the day we arrived. It was the oldest one who drove the boat round our dinghy and nearly made us sink. From the way they talk to each other, I realise they must be brothers.

Nico gulps in fear and then he says boldly, "I don't think I want to do that again – go on the boats and chase the refugees away. I don't like the refugees being here chopping down our trees and messing up our beach any more than you do. But last time we were out on the boat, you

nearly got one drowned. It isn't safe chasing the dinghies with our motorboat."

"Not *safe*?" Kestof, the oldest brother, shakes his head in disgust.

The younger one rolls his eyes. "You've been talking to Uncle Jaff again, haven't you?" he snorts.

Nico shrugs and shuffles his feet uncomfortably, which the boys take to mean 'yes'.

"What did I tell you about talking to Uncle Jaff about refugees?" Kestof says angrily. "If it was up to him, our whole island would be one big refugee camp. He'd invite them all to live here and he'd give them *our* homes, *our* jobs and *our* fish!"

When Nico mutters something else that his brothers don't hear, Kestof shakes him by the shoulder to make him repeat it. "Uncle Jaff says they only take a few fish. He says they only do that because they're hungry."

"Those fish are our livelihood!" Kestof shouts.

"And you want to let illegal immigrants come and steal them all? What's wrong with you, Nico?"

"It's all that drawing he does that's making him forget what's important around here," the other boy scoffs. Kestof opens Nico's pad of paper up and sneers when he sees that it's full of sketches. Even though I can't see them from here, I can tell Nico's put a lot of work into them as he's trying to grab the pad back again, begging his brother not to take it away.

"Don't be such a baby – I don't want to keep your drawings," Kestof says, pushing Nico away. "But you're not keeping them either. You need to learn to put your family first. Maybe this will teach you what's important and what's not."

Before Nico can stop him, Kestof rips the pages out of the pad and tears them into pieces, throwing them away. As the little bits of paper are caught by the breeze and go fluttering over the beach and into the sea, Nico's eyes go wide with shock and his bottom lip starts trembling. He grits his teeth bravely despite how hurt he is, keeping his mouth shut as both his brothers

laugh at him.

"No more pointless drawing – and no more shirking your work in the fishing boats, understood?" Kestof says when he's finished sniggering. Nico nods miserably.

"Right then. Dad's setting the boat up for a fishing run on the late tide. You'd better be down at the harbour in half an hour, Nico. Do *not* be late. Come on, Riktos – let's get the gear ready."

The two older boys walk off to the harbour, leaving Nico watching the remains of his drawings drifting away on the waves.

I don't know what to say to him. He knows I've been watching this whole time and listening to everything his brothers said. But when I come out of hiding, he turns his back on me like he wants me just to walk away and pretend I haven't seen anything. As I start heading along the beach to the boatyard, something catches my eye before I've taken more than ten steps.

Nico's pad is lying in the sand where it's been

thrown, the torn edges of paper peeking out of the crumpled covers. I stop when I see there are a couple of pages still left inside. Carefully taking out the loose pages from the discarded pad, I stare in wonder at the first picture. It's a colour drawing done with the kind of oil pastels my nana used when I was very little. When she passed away before the war, the walls of our cabin were covered with her pictures of woodland glades and waterfalls, their rich colours cheering up the long winter nights. This drawing isn't of an autumn forest in Lapagonia, though. It's a sunset scene of this beach, the red light dancing on the water. There are palm trees lining the shore, making me feel bad again when I remember the real ones that have all been cut down and turned into cooking fires to feed hungry people.

When I see the other picture, I gasp in surprise.

It's a pencil drawing of Jaff Kepoy and Dada working on an engine in the boatyard. It's so good that I can see the enthusiasm in Dada's eyes as he works on the outboard motor and the little smile lines around Jaff's mouth that make him look so friendly. Nico must have been



spending time at the boatyard over the last few days. He's obviously still feeling guilty about his brother driving the motorboat too close to our dinghy and Dada falling in the water. I hope that maybe he's changed his mind a little bit about refugees now that he's talked to us, just like Dada changed his mind about the people from Regland after getting to know the Stanton family.

Maybe Nico deserves a second chance after all.

I turn back, hoping Nico won't be angry that I've been looking at his private pictures. When he sees them, though, his face lights up. "They didn't tear up my favourite one!"

At first, I think he's talking about the beautiful sunset picture. But when he takes his sketches back, it's the one of his Uncle Jaff and Dada that he's looking at.

"They're really good," I tell him. "I've never met anyone who could draw as well as that. Well, maybe my nana – but she had about a billion years' more practice. She used to sell her pictures at art fairs. Have you ever done that?"

Nico shakes his head. "My mother used to hang my pictures up around the house and tell me I could be an artist one day. She died when I was seven. She had a good job working for a big ferry company at the harbour. Now that she's gone, fishing is all my family's got – we don't make much money from it, though. I can't show my family these: my dad thinks it's a silly hobby and I waste all my time drawing when I should be helping him catch fish. You saw what happened when my brothers found them."

It makes me so sad to hear about his mother that I'm scared to answer for a long moment in case I start crying and make myself look silly.

I'm lucky that I still have my family after the war. But we lost track of so many people – our friends and neighbours and pets – that it feels like there's a big hole in my life where all of them should be. Most of all, I miss my best friend, Lissal, so I can begin to imagine how Nico must feel about not having his mother here any more. I try to think of something encouraging to say instead of asking him about sad things.

"But your Uncle Jaff knows you're good at

drawing, doesn't he?" Nico nods, looking happier.

"Uncle Jaff's great. He lets me keep my pictures at his place so my brothers can't ruin them and my dad can't use them to light the barbecue. Dad says it's a waste of paper, otherwise."

"Your dad sets your pictures on *fire*?" I'm horrified at that. My parents keep all of Pan and Gil's drawings and show them off proudly to anyone who visits our tent.

"He's not trying to be mean, not really," Nico says quickly. "He just misses mum a lot. My pictures remind him of her and so they make him sad. On top of that, he's worried that being an artist isn't a job I can earn a living from when I'm older – that's why he doesn't want to encourage me. Money's already tight – if I don't join the family fishing business, then they'll have to pay for another worker. And I couldn't care less about engines, which means I can't go and work with Uncle Jaff either."

"What's wrong with fishing?" I ask, looking out across the sea and watching the sun glitter on

the water. If I could spend all my time gliding over the waves in a boat and pulling in nets of silver fish to sell, I'd be much happier than Nico looks.

"Fishing's OK." He shrugs. "But I don't want to spend any more time stuck on this island than I have to. I can't wait to get away."

"But this is your home!" I protest. "Why would you want to leave your family and friends and go somewhere else if you don't have to?"

Nico opens his mouth to reply and then hesitates, throwing me a searching look like I'm a mystery he's just starting to solve. Even though I haven't told him that I'm missing my own home and all the people and places I was forced to leave behind, I think he can guess what's going through my head from the look on my face. After seeing how his brothers treat him, I can make a good guess, myself, at why he might not want to spend all of his time with them.

"There's a big art college in the Dorrican capital city where I want to study," he says carefully,

like he's trying not to upset me. "But it's really expensive – there's no way my dad could afford it, even if he didn't think art was a waste of time."

I nod like I understand, trying to show Nico we can be friends in spite of our differences. But looking at that pretty house on the hill with its bright paint and its view of the sea, it's hard to imagine Nico's family struggling for money. When I remember that my parents didn't earn much in Lapagonia either, it makes me feel guilty. Although our cosy, little log cabin by the lake wasn't a palace, to the homeless refugees from Regland, it would've looked like a fairy-tale castle.

"At least there are lots of beautiful views on the island you can draw," I say, "even if you don't ever go to the mainland." I'm trying to be encouraging but it makes Nico frown.

"I can't stand the thought of being stuck out here in the middle of nowhere for the rest of my life. I want to travel the world and draw all the amazing sights in new places."

"New places are *never* as good as home," I say stubbornly, starting to get annoyed at him. He's getting frustrated with me, too, but neither of us wants to quit before we've proved we're right.

"If this island is so beautiful, then why don't you want to stay for ever?" Nico shoots back.

"Because it's not my home," I tell him. "And I don't want to spend the rest of my life in a refugee camp, obviously."

"So, if the government built your family a house here, you'd stay and not go to the mainland?" Nico asks.

That makes me pause. "I'd still want to go to the university in the capital," I admit eventually. "I can't study medicine here like I want to."

"So, it's OK for you to want to study medicine in the capital city but not OK for me to want to study art there?"

Now, I know why Nico's getting angry. He thinks I'm telling him to give up on his dreams and to stay here for the rest of his life to fish,

just like his family.

"Oh... that's not what I meant," I say quickly.
"It's just... I miss home so much, that's all."

Nico's sulky expression softens like he understands me now too. I'm worried he's going to ask me what I miss about home, because that might make me cry. Before he can say anything, I ask, "Is there anything you'll miss about Trigos if you go to the mainland? Apart from Flicker and your family?"

Nico thinks for a minute and then he grins. "Come back here tomorrow afternoon and I'll show you."

"Show me what?"

"It's a surprise. Just come back tomorrow."

A *surprise*. That sounds exciting. For the first time since I arrived on the island, I feel like I've got something to look forward to.

"I've got to go to the harbour," Nico says suddenly, remembering his brother's warning.

"Here – you can keep these." When he hands me his two pictures, my mouth hangs open in amazement.

"But they're yours!" I protest. "And they're so good! Don't you want them? You said this one was your favourite."

"That's why I want *you* to have them," Nico says, his smile turning a little sad. "If I keep them, my brothers will tear them up. Dad and Uncle Jaff just had a big argument about the refugees – now, Dad says I can't talk to Uncle Jaff any more."

Before I can say anything else, he runs off across the beach, heading for the harbour and calling over his shoulder, "Remember to come back tomorrow afternoon!"

I wave and then start walking back to the boatyard, thinking that I'll give Nico's pictures to his Uncle Jaff to look after so they don't get ruined in the refugee camp. Then, I have a better idea. Smiling to myself, I cross over the road and walk up the main street to Mr and Mrs Papidos's shop.

CHAPTER EIGHT



The next day, Dada lets me come with him to work. Jaff Kepoy's gone to the mainland again to deliver a repaired speedboat to a customer – that means Dada's been left with the head mechanic, Barstos, for a few days. Despite the weather getting hotter every day, Barstos has been getting colder towards Dada. He criticises everything Dada does and goes back over all of Dada's work, even though he got it right the first time. Dada keeps his mouth shut whenever Barstos rants at him in Dorrican. He only understands a little of what the head mechanic says – but even that's enough to make Dada clench his jaw in anger.

I don't translate any of the things that Barstos mutters to himself when he thinks we're not listening.

Jaff's left sandwiches and some cold fried rice for us in the fridge for lunch. Dada keeps his to take home to share out at dinner time with Pan and Gil and all the hungry refugees who come to our tent. Although I want to be generous like him, I'm so hungry that I can't help having one of the sandwiches and a few spoonfuls of rice to ease the ache in my belly. While I'm eating and having a cool drink of coconut juice in the office, Barstos comes in to make a phone call. At first, I think he's talking to a customer who's asking about one of the boats. Then, I realise it must be a friend, as he starts talking about how the town's been overrun by refugees and how the hotel bookings are way down because all the 'illegals' are putting the tourists off. He doesn't look at me the whole time he's talking, even though I'm sitting right across the desk from him. It makes me really uncomfortable, because he knows I can hear him and understand everything he says.

My stomach knots up as I listen to him ranting

about how families like mine are ruining his country. Although the words are his, they leave a sour taste in my mouth and I lose my appetite. Now, I know why he's been getting meaner towards Dada. He's acting just like Nico did at first when it comes to refugees. As long as no one else said mean things, they could both be nice to us. But when Nico's brothers or Barstos's friends started complaining about refugees, then they joined in too. Nico's braver than Barstos is, though. At least Nico had the guts to stand up to his brothers.

I put the rest of the sandwiches and rice back in the fridge and go out to ask Dada if I can visit Mr and Mrs Papidos for the afternoon. It's not exactly a lie – I do plan on dropping by the shop later. But there's something I want to do first that I don't want to tell Dada about in case he says no.

Dada's concentrating on his repairs so that he doesn't do anything to make Barstos angry; he just nods without looking up from his work and tells me not to stay too long. I fill my water bottle at the tap and then I hurry out to the beach, half excited and half nervous at the thought of

what might happen next. Nico's got something he wants to share with me – something that's a *surprise*. After looking at his beautiful drawings yesterday, I know it must be something good.

At first, I don't think Nico's going to show up.

I sit on the beach for a long time, tracing patterns in the sand until it gets too hot and I have to find some shelter in the shade of the rocks. I'm just thinking of giving up and going back to the boatyard, when Nico finally comes running down the hill from his house.

"Sorry," he says when he sees how impatient I look. "I had to work in the harbour with Dad this morning and then I had to do my schoolwork. I'd be in trouble tomorrow if my sums weren't finished."

"You go to school on a Sunday?" I ask, surprised.

Nico looks embarrassed and mutters, "I'm not very good at maths. My teacher keeps sending work home for me to finish at the weekend – I don't understand it any better in my bedroom than I do in the classroom, though."

I bite my tongue before I can tell him that I was top of the class in school and I could do difficult division sums standing on my head. I say instead, "I could help, if you like. Maths was my favourite subject at school."

He gives me a sideways look and I realise how silly that sounds. I've missed so much school because of the war and being a refugee that I'm probably at least a year behind him by now. It turns out that's not what's making him raise his eyebrows at me, though.

"You *like* maths?" he snorts. "You must be the only person I know who does. But if you want to do mine for me, that would be great!"

"Not *for* you – *with* you. I could maybe help you understand your sums. And you could teach me how to draw."

"Oh, OK. But I don't want to think about school any more today. You want to come and see something special?"

I nod eagerly and then I hesitate, looking back at the boatyard. "We're not going far, are we?"

My father says I'm not to go any farther than the harbour."

"Don't worry – we're going along the coast the other way, towards the camp, so you're not really going any farther, are you?"

"I guess not. Aren't you going to bring Flicker?"

"Not today. You'll know why when we get there."

I follow Nico up the hill and along the edge of



the cliff, watching the seabirds swooping and diving over the surface of the water as they hunt for glistening fish. They're just as big as the birds of prey that used to fly down from the forest to catch fish on the lake by our house. They're a different colour, though. The birds in Lapagonia were shades of brown, their speckled wings blending in with the trees. These birds are bright white and smoky grey, disappearing into the wispy clouds as they soar off with their fish. As I watch them, I can't help thinking how strange it is that even the birds are different in this new country. Before I know it, I'm wondering if their cries and songs sound like different languages to each other too.

"We're here." Nico stops suddenly as the coast starts curving round the headland, at a big bit of cliff that overhangs the sea.

"Here where?" I ask, looking around. I'm not sure what the surprise is that he promised to show me. Behind us, the main road is winding up the hill in the distance and we've left the town and beach behind.

"Not back there. Down *here*."

Nico pushes a bush aside and points to a hidden path that's snaking down the face of the cliff. I look at it doubtfully. "Is that safe?" I ask.

"I come here all the time. It's fine. Come on!"

He heads down the path like one of the mountain goats that live in the high Lapagonian hills. I follow more slowly behind him, holding on to the rocks that stick out from the cliff face and grabbing handfuls of grass along the edge of the path to steady myself.

When we get down to the beach, I realise the scary walk down has totally been worth it.

The small cove we're standing in is beautiful. The high rocks cut us off from the rest of the beach on either side, giving us protection from the hot sun and turning this little patch of shore into a private hideaway. The waves whisper secrets to the sand as they wash onto the rocks, leaving a row of seashells like little gifts on the tideline. When I look up, I can see so many birds nesting in the cliff face that the cove looks like the wildlife sanctuary I saw on a nature programme once.

Nico nudges me and puts his finger to his lips, pointing at one of the rocks by the sea. Lying on a big, flat stone, like they're sunbathing, are two seals. They blend in so well that I wouldn't have noticed them on my own, even though we're standing close enough to see their whiskers twitching as they sleep. There's a large, grey one that's clearly the mother and a very small baby one that still has pale fur instead of smooth skin.

"Now you know why I couldn't bring Flicker," Nico whispers, leading me by the arm to a line of rocks farther away where we can watch the seals without disturbing them.

"How did you find this place?" I ask in wonder. "Was it when you were out on your family's fishing boat?"

Nico shakes his head. "It was Flicker who found the path. Well, sort of. She was chasing a ball, when she ran straight into the bush. I got a fright, as I thought she'd fallen over the edge of the cliff. But when I ran to look, she was standing on the path. She would've run all the way down to the beach to fetch the ball if I

hadn't put her lead back on in time."

"And now, you come here to draw?" I ask, pointing at the sketch pad he's pulling out of his rucksack. I'm glad to see his brothers haven't been able to stop him doing something he's so good at.

"Yes, whenever I can. I've got a picture of the seals I want to finish. Are you OK to stay down here a little longer?"

I nearly tell him that I could stay here in this beautiful cove for ever but then I remember how much I miss home. I just nod instead, stretching out on the rocks and letting the sea breeze cool my hot skin. After a while, the soft lapping sound of waves as the water ebbs and flows on the sand makes me sleepy. I stop trying to fight the feeling, closing my eyes and relaxing. I haven't been at peace like this since before the war. We'd been on the move for the whole journey here, so I thought I'd get more sleep once we arrived on Trigos. Even though we're finally staying still, the refugee camp's so crowded and noisy that no one gets any proper rest.



I don't realise that I've gone to sleep until Nico nudges me again. "Look – I've finished," he says shyly, holding out his picture. "What do you think?"

I rub my eyes and take a look. I thought the one he did of Dada and Jaff was brilliant but this one's even better. The different pencil shades have captured the grey of the rocks, the seals and the sea perfectly. The picture reminds me of something from years ago that I hadn't thought about for a long time. I think for a bit, trying to remember what it was. Then, I smile when I realise the cove looks like the mermaid temple from my favourite book when I was little.

"Wow," is all I say. It's enough. Nico grins like it's the biggest compliment I could have given him and stores his picture carefully at the back of his pad. Then, he pulls a small box out of his rucksack and offers me the fried pastries inside. "Try these," he says. "You'll like them – they're delicious."

I smile back and put some into my small plastic bag alongside my water bottle.

"Aren't you going to eat them now?" Nico asks, popping one into his mouth.

"I'll keep them for my little brother and sister. They're always hungry – it's hard listening to them crying at night if there's not enough food."

"Oh." Nico swallows, looking guilty. Then, he offers me the whole box. When I take it gratefully, he asks, "How old are they? Your brother and sister, I mean."

I start telling him their ages and before I know it, I'm talking about how Gil used to be so bubbly and talkative before the war and how Pan used to march around pretending to be president of Lapagonia. Now, Gil just hides away in the refugee camp tent barely saying anything to anyone and clinging to Mami like he's still on the boat and she's his lifejacket. Things are just as bad for Pan – she comes back from the school tent every day with a stack of pictures of Bam-Bear, an empty belly and a sad look on her face.

"Who's Bam-Bear?" Nico asks. "Is that a cartoon character in your country?"

"No, it's Pan's teddy bear. Nana gave him to her when Pan was born. She took him everywhere with her – to school, to bed, on holiday. She even used to set a place for him at the dinner table so he could listen to us tell each other how our day went." I smile at the memory but then I feel sad again.

"What happened to him? Did she have to leave him behind when you left your country?"

I shake my head. "That bear survived everything – bombs, bullets, even a long trip hiding in the back of a truck to get to the sea. But when we got here..." I trail off, the memory still painful.

"What?" Nico says, looking concerned. "Did she lose him at the refugee camp?"

I shake my head again, harder this time. "He fell into the water when the motorboats tried to stop us from landing and we climbed onto the coastguards' boat. Dada tried to reach in and pull Bam-Bear out before he sank but..."

When I trail off again, Nico's eyes go wide. "Is that when Kestof drove too fast round your

dinghy and your dad fell in?"

I nod, not wanting to say any more. I don't want to blame Nico for what happened. He already feels bad, even though he stood up for the refugees against his brothers, which can't have been easy. He goes quiet for a bit and then asks, "Does she miss him a lot?"

"She doesn't talk about anything else," I tell him. "She hardly ever smiles any more; it's really hard listening to her crying at night because he's not there. I told her he's having an adventure under the sea while we're here on Trigos and he's having lots of fun. When she finds out he's not coming back to her, I don't know what she'll do." Before I can stop it, a big tear runs down my cheek and splashes onto the rocks.

"I know what that's like," Nico says softly. "I used to have this stuffed dog that I took everywhere. Uncle Jaff got it on the mainland on a trip to repair boats for a big fishing company. When I was little, it was like that dog was my best friend. But one day, when we were out fishing, Kestof and Riktos were mucking about in the

boat, throwing my stuffed toy to each other, and Kestof dropped it into the sea."

"That's awful!" I say, shocked.

"Oh, it was ages ago," Nico says, trying to laugh about it. "And Dad gave him an earful for it. He even got me Flicker for my tenth birthday to make up for it, so it all turned out OK in the end."

"That isn't going to work with Pan," I say, trying to smile back even though I feel so bad. "We can't exactly get her a real bear, can we?"

Before Nico can reply, there's a big splash that makes us jump. When we look round, we see the tails of the seals disappearing as they slip into the sea. I glance up at the sun and realise we've been here far longer than I meant to be. "I've got to go," I say, standing up and clambering across the rocks. "I was supposed to be back at the boatyard ages ago."

We head up the path and hurry along the clifftop, my stomach knotting when I think about how late I'm going to be. Nico's looking worried, too,

but not because of the time. In the distance, we can see two figures coming towards us. I know he recognises them before I do because I can hear him drawing in a sharp breath.

“Alina, take this for me, will you?” he says, opening his rucksack and shoving his sketch pad into my hands. “You can keep all the drawings – I don’t mind. I just don’t want them to be ripped up.”

That’s when I realise who the figures heading our way are. I tuck the pad into my trousers, pulling my T-shirt down over it to hide what I’ve got there.

“You’d better go back by the main road,” Nico says urgently. “I’m already in trouble. If they see that I’m with a... well, someone from the camp, they’ll be even angrier at me.”

Before I can ask if we can go down to the cove again soon, he’s hurried off to meet his two brothers. I cut across the grass to the main road. I’m getting nervous, as I’m already really late. But there’s somewhere I need to go first. Nico’s been really nice to me today and showed

me somewhere special even though he’s going to get into trouble for it. I want to give him a present too. Although I’m going to be in trouble myself for not being back at the boatyard ages ago, there’s something I need to do for Nico before I see Dada. I hurry up the hill, the bell on the door tinkling as I open the door to Mr and Mrs Papidos’s shop.

CHAPTER NINE



I don't get a chance to go back to the beach to see Nico the next day, or the day after that. In fact, I don't think I'll ever get a chance to leave the camp again, because the camp gates have been closed by the guards. Dada and the other refugee workers aren't allowed out any more; that means there's no money to buy food and nothing to share with the other hungry people in the camp.

It all started three days ago, with a big commotion at the camp gates.

Mami had just coaxed Gil into going to the school tent with Pan, and Dada had agreed

to let me go to the boatyard as Barstos was being so difficult, when everything went wrong. Standing near the back of the queue at the gates with our pass books, Dada and I suddenly heard shouts from the front of the line.

"They're not letting us out! These armed thugs are taking our pass books away!"

At first people didn't understand, as the shouts were in Reggish. Then, others started to translate, passing the message down the line. It wasn't long before everyone was shouting



angrily. When the big queue of people started pushing forwards, trying to get to the gates, Dada had to lift me up so I wouldn't get hurt. The shouting got louder as people got stuck in the crush, making the guards even angrier. Soon, no one could hear anyone else over the terrible noise.

Then, there came the sounds of gunfire. The shouts turned into yells of fright as the crowd stopped pushing and retreated, leaving a big space in front of the gates where the guards were standing. I'd covered my ears in fear when I heard the gunshots, burying my face in Dada's chest. When I looked up, I was relieved to see the guards had just shot into the air instead of at the angry people.

The head guard stepped forwards and started shouting at us again, telling us that there had been too many thefts in town and that the government was suspending day passes until further notice. By the time that was translated into lots of different languages, the crowd was furious. There was nothing we could do against the locked gates and the guards with their guns; we just had to accept it. Even though we were

told to hand in our pass books and go back to our tents, most of the refugees just stuck their books in their pockets before hurrying away. We had more sense than that. Everyone knew that we wouldn't get the books back if we handed them to the guards now.

Dada and I went to find Mami. She was with the people from the Dorrican Refugee Charity at the main administration area. Lots of people had gathered there already, shouting about the new rules and complaining about the guards. The Refugee Charity workers went to talk to the guards to find out what was going on, as they hadn't been told about the gates being locked either. It took ages for them to come back; everyone was looking so upset by then that I was scared there was going to be a riot in the camp. When they eventually returned and Mami helped them translate, what they said made everyone even more cross.

The Trigos Council had decided not to let the refugees out of the camp without a special permit, which we'd have to apply for at their office. But they hadn't provided us with the forms to fill in either. Since we weren't allowed

out of the camp, we couldn't get hold of them and we couldn't go to the office in town to apply. Even though the Refugee Charity workers promised to drive straight there to bring enough forms back for everyone who wanted to fill one in, that only solved half the problem. People were already beginning to mutter angrily when Mami helped translate the worst bit.

The government said there had been lots of thefts and vandalism in town, which the police suspected were done by refugees. Because of the crime, they said it was the refugees' fault that there weren't many tourists booked to come in the summer. When that translation made everyone start yelling at once, Mami told Dada to take me back to our tent. He wasn't happy leaving her there with the furious crowd and neither was I. She said they weren't angry at her, though, and if she helped translate, then she could also help calm things down.

When we got back to 'our street', we saw a big group of people from Regland gathered outside the Stanton family's tent discussing what had happened. When Mrs Stanton saw us, she waved us over to join them. I could tell Dada wasn't

keen on me getting involved. But since I was the only one who could translate for him and since Eddis, Tolia and a whole bunch of other kids were there too, he let me join the group.

The Regland refugees were discussing the police and how they'd been rounding up anyone from the camp they saw in town. I remembered the people arrested outside the beauty salon the other week and the way the police had shouted at the men on the beach. I was too scared to ask the adults why the police were treating the people from the camp this way – so I was glad when Mrs Stanton asked the question instead. One of the men said that everyone knew the thefts were carried out by a gang of bored teenagers from Trigos. The refugees were just getting blamed so the government had an excuse to close the camp.

The group started complaining about being blamed unfairly for the vandalism, too, but Dada just frowned when I translated that bit for him. I could tell he was thinking about the trees cut down by the beach, the same way I was. I still didn't think that was the refugees' fault, though. They were just trying to help feed

the other people in the camp and make money for their families at the same time. And they were trying to be responsible by cooking on the beach. If they'd cut the trees up here on the dry hill, they would've started a big fire that might have put the camp in danger.

"We've been put in an impossible position," Dada muttered. When I asked him what he meant, he just shook his head and walked back to our tent.

That was three days ago. Since then, everything's gone from bad to worse.

"Do you think they're going to let us starve to death?" Tolia asks me as we sit on the baked earth outside our tents, watching the adults argue with the Refugee Charity workers and fight among themselves.

"Mami says the Refugee Charity has persuaded the government to send more food," I say, trying to sound hopeful. "It should be here any day now and –"

"We're not going to starve," Eddis interrupts.

"We'll die of dehydration first." He points to their empty plastic water bottles that haven't been filled for days. When the water tanker came yesterday, there was a stampede at the gates when the guards opened them. There were so many people desperate for water that the tanker couldn't get through, so the guards sent the tanker back to town until things calmed down. The water vats we rely on for our supplies still haven't been filled and that's making everyone even more anxious.

"Alina's family will be fine, as always. People like them have enough money to pay for water," Tolia says to Eddis, giving me a sideways look.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I demand. We're all tired, thirsty and hungry, which is making us bad-tempered and nasty to each other.

"You lot from rich countries like Lapagonia always find a way to get what you want. I heard there were people cutting the fence and sneaking out at night to the river to smuggle water into the camp. They sell it to the highest bidder – that means it's only rich people like

you Lapagonians who can afford to pay for it.”

“That’s not true!” I snap, seething when I think of how Gil stayed up half the night crying because he was so thirsty. “We don’t have any more than you do – everything we’ve ever had, we’ve shared!”

“That’s not true though, is it? Everyone knows your mother gets extra food rations because she works with the Refugee Charity.” Eddis says it matter-of-factly like there’s no way I can argue with him, even though I know it’s just another made-up rumour.

“Is that what you think?” I yell, my throat too dry for it to come out louder than a croak. “Well, if that’s your opinion of me and my family, you can all just jog right off and not talk to me again!”

“Fine,” Tolia mutters. “Come on, Eddis. Let’s not waste any more time with the rich Lapagonians.”

They disappear off into the sea of tents, leaving me stewing with anger but too hot and tired to do anything about it. Great. Now, I’ve fallen

out with the only friends I have here. If I wasn’t so thirsty, I’d scream with how unfair it all is.

Instead, I wander over to the edge of the camp, wondering if what Eddis and Tolia said about people sneaking out for water is true. Even though I walk half the length of the long fence on our side, I can’t see a single strand of the thick barbed wire that’s been cut, or a gap anywhere in the chain links. I’m just turning back before I reach the heavily guarded gates, when I see someone coming towards me on the other side of the fence.

“Alina! I thought that was you,” a familiar voice calls. When he gets closer, I can see that it’s Jaff Kepoy. “After I got back from the mainland last night, Barstos said your father hadn’t been to work for days. I was wondering what had happened.”

“It’s not his fault!” I say quickly, worried that Jaff will think he’s being lazy and fire him for good. “The guards won’t let us out of the camp.”

“I know – I just talked to them.” Jaff frowns, shaking his head like he thinks it’s as unfair

as we do. "The Trigos Council makes up an excuse to close the camp every summer during tourist season. This year it's worse because the government has cut back on food aid and supplies."

"People in here are starting to say the government's going to starve us to stop us going to the mainland. Is that true?" I ask. I never thought I could believe anything so terrible. It must be the truth, though, as we're going to bed hungry every night. Dada has to spend all day in the food queue for our little box of rations, or the food tent will run out before he gets there. For the last week, there have been armed guards patrolling by the food and storage sheds to stop people getting in and stealing things. Last night, I even saw a woman grab a piece of bread out of a little boy's hand and run away with it. I hate the way that hungry refugees have been turned into criminals. I don't know why the government is doing this when people in Dorrica have so much.

"I think the government's trying to stop people from crossing to Trigos. There's an election coming up and there's a lot of anti-migrant

feeling on the mainland and... Look, it's complicated, Alina. Tell your father to meet me here tomorrow morning at ten o'clock and I'll try to help him get a permit to work at the boatyard. It should be easier if I sign the form saying I'm offering him a job."

I'm half hopeful at Jaff's offer and half annoyed at him for talking to me like I'm too young to understand. But I forgive him instantly when he pulls a bag of food and water out of his rucksack.

"Don't throw it over!" I warn, before he can let go. "It'll get caught in the barbed wire." The thought of food getting stuck up in the fencing coils when we're all so hungry makes my stomach growl even louder. When Jaff passes the fried pastries through the spaces in the chain links one by one instead, I put them into the plastic bag that holds my empty water bottle.

"Nico told me to bring these," he smiles. "He said to say hello. He wanted to come with me but I think you know why he can't."

I nod. His father and brothers would be furious

if he came to visit refugees at the camp. I'm just happy he hasn't forgotten about me and that he's still talking to his nice uncle, even if his family have told him not to. Jaff tosses the water bottles over and I manage to catch them and put them in my bag too. I'm about to give him a message to pass on to Nico for me, when we see a guard walking round the fence in our direction. Jaff tells me to hide the bag under my T-shirt and then he hurries off before he's caught. I wave goodbye quickly and run back to my tent before anyone else can smell the food and take it from me.

Even though it's only early evening, Dada's come back to say they've closed the food tent up already as there'll be no more supplies until tomorrow's delivery. Before Gil and Pan can start crying, I show them the food that Jaff brought for us. I thought Mami and Dada would be happy, too, but they just look worried.

"We can't keep it all," Mami whispers to him.

"I know. But if word gets out we've got a little extra, there'll be a riot," he says under his breath. "And anyway, our own children need to

come first."

"We'll just give what we can to the Stantons' children," Mami says. "They'll know not to tell other people after what happened last time."

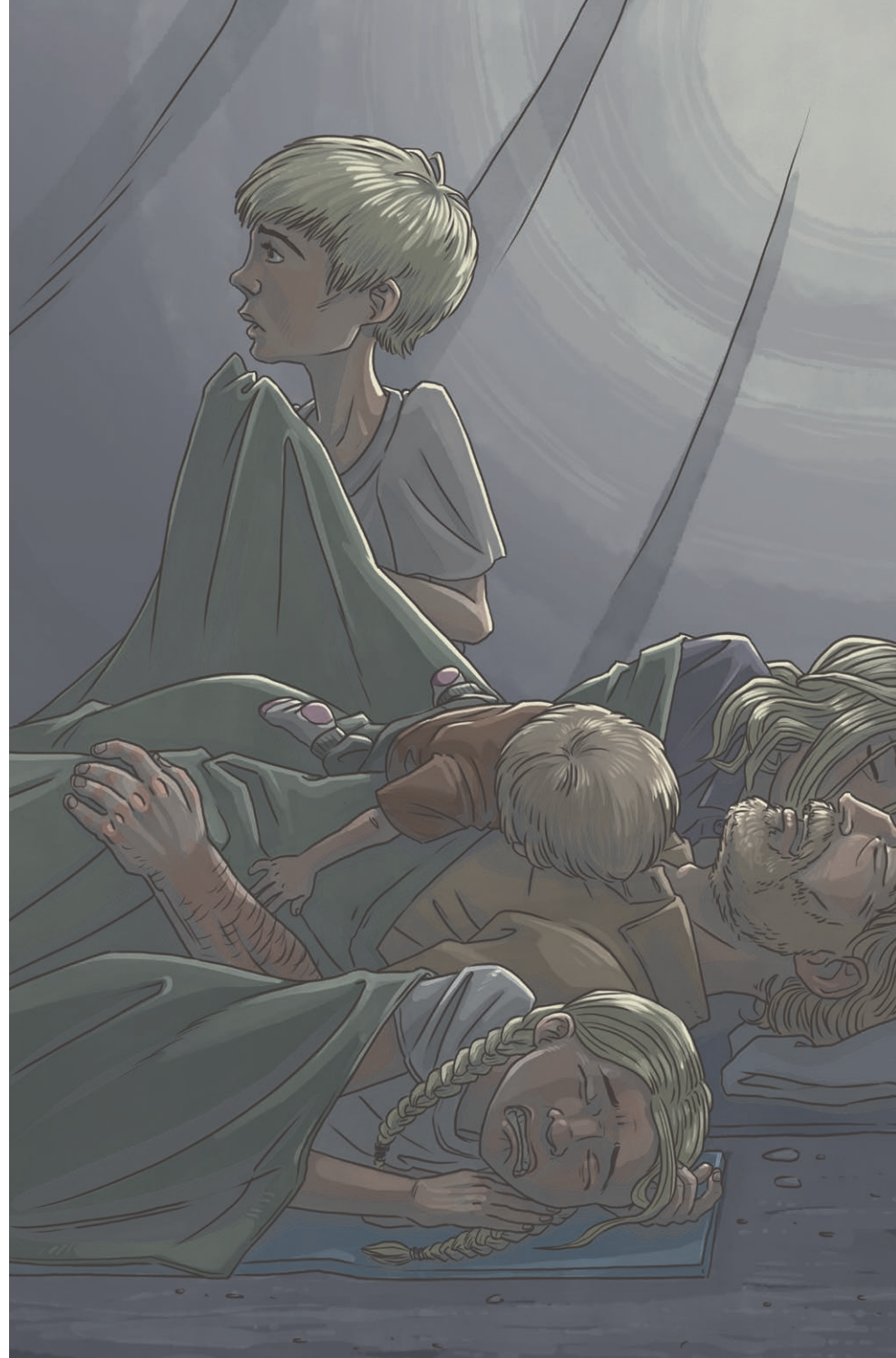
I want Mami and Dada to have something to eat, too, so I don't feel so bad about shoving pastries in my mouth and barely chewing before I swallow them. When I offer food to them, though, they just shake their heads and say they're not hungry. Mami waits until Pan and Gil are full for once. Then, she takes what's left and heads over to the Stantons' tent. I follow her, hoping I can make things up with Eddis and Tolia. But when Mami gives them the rest of our food and one of our precious water bottles, they don't look happy. Mrs Stanton turns to her husband and mutters, "I told you so," and Tolia looks at me in disgust, like I've been hiding food from her this whole time.

There's a big group of people from Regland gathered in the street outside the tents, whispering together in the dark. Before they stop talking as Mami and I pass by, I hear one of them say, "Are we all agreed on what we

need to do?" and another asking, "Where are we going to get the petrol from?"

Even though Mami hurries me away before I hear anything else, I've heard enough to know that they're going to fight against the new rules. After the way we've been locked up in here like prisoners, I want to be excited that the adults are planning to change things. But instead, I can't help feeling scared when I see the way they clench their fists and growl out angry words as they make their secret plans.

That night, I lie awake listening to the whispers rustling through the camp like the wind in the autumn leaves back home in Lapagonia. There are shouts sometimes, too, and I can hear babies howling in other tents and children crying because they're hungry. Gil isn't crying tonight, at least. With his belly full for a change, he's fast asleep with his head on Dada's chest and his feet in Mami's lap. They're both so tired they're sleeping too, despite the noise of the camp. But I know Pan's awake: the big searchlights above the camp fence shine through the tent walls and I can see the outline of her shoulders hunched and trembling above the blanket.



“Panny, what’s up?” I whisper softly, trying not to wake Mami and Dada.

When she turns to look at me, I can see she’s been crying again. “When’s Bam-Bear coming back?” she asks. “You said he’d gone on an adventure in the ocean. It’s been ages and he’ll be all cold and wet by now. When’s he coming back to me?”

“Um...” I try to think of a happy ending to Bam-Bear’s story but I’m all out of ideas. Even worse, we’ve woken Dada up. He’s exhausted and half asleep and so he’s not thinking straight when he mumbles, “Bam-Bear’s gone, Pan. He fell in the sea – remember? But don’t worry – we’ll get you another teddy when we get to Dorrica. Not long now. Go back to sleep – it’s late.”

Dada rolls over, snoring again straight away. He doesn’t see Pan’s eyes getting even wider in shock, like I do, and the last ray of hope in them flickering and dying in the dark before I can save it.

CHAPTER TEN



Pan hasn’t eaten anything for days, even though Jaff Kepoy’s been bringing us food. It’s like she’s given up. Even if Jaff manages to get Dada a work permit like he promised, it won’t bring Pan back to us. Gil’s slipping away into his own world too. He doesn’t even cry any more when he hears people fighting over supplies, or the guards firing their guns into the air to break up fights.

When Eddis and Tolia hear Pan’s not eating, they bring her the stuffed rabbit from the school room to cheer her up. Although it doesn’t work, I’m grateful they tried. Tolia says they’re sorry for saying mean things about us – they’re all

so hungry and sick of the camp that they can barely think straight. I know how she feels. It's like the whole camp is a lifeboat that's sinking, only this time there are no coastguards to save us and no hope of reaching the shore. The refugees from Regland have been here the longest – their muttering at night is getting so loud it's only a matter of time before words turn into action.

I can only hope that whatever they do, it doesn't make everything even worse.

The heat's been unbearable all week. Dada's spent the day queuing at the water vats that have finally been filled, making sure we get our share before it runs out again. I wanted to help, as the buckets and water bottles are a lot for Dada to carry back on his own. But with all the fighting that's been going on, he doesn't want me anywhere near big crowds. Mami's working at the administration tents again and Pan and Gil are in the school tent. The Refugee Charity managed to get hold of a small generator that they've rigged up to cooling fans so the kids can get some sleep in there during the day, as it's too hot in our tents at night. I tried to sleep there, too, but I can't stop my mind from whirring

round and round like the fans.

I go for a walk along the fence instead, staring out at the world beyond the chain links and barbed wire and dreaming of what life could be like if we could only get out of this camp. It's evening by now and the light is fading. I know Mami and Dada won't like me wandering about on my own, especially as the searchlights won't be on for another few hours to save power. I can't stand being stuck in a tent any longer, though, and the air here is cooler from the sea breeze sweeping up the hill.

I'm just about to turn back, when I notice something at the bottom of the fence.

I bend down and find that there's a section of chain links loose where the metal's been cut clean in two by a heavy tool. When I test it to see how far I can pull the fence up, I find it's just big enough for someone to crawl through. Eddis and Tolia must be right. There must be people sneaking out to get water from the river after all. Jaff told Dada the other day that the police have been catching more refugees trying to stow away on the ferry to the mainland.

That might mean some of the people who sneak out for water don't come back. I don't blame them. The thought of escaping from this place makes me dizzy with longing. If my family wasn't here, I'd crawl right out and run and run without looking back.

When I stand up again, I see someone staring straight at me on the other side of the fence. I get such a fright that, at first, I don't recognise the brown eyes I've seen before.

"Hey, don't be scared – it's just me," Nico says, stepping closer so I can see him clearly.

"Nico! What are you doing here?" I gasp. "You're going to get into big trouble."

"I know. But I had to come and see you, to give you this." Nico takes his backpack off and rummages around inside, pulling out more paper and pencils.

"Nico, your pictures are brilliant," I sigh, disappointed that it's not food. "But I can't take any more of them. Besides, I'm not keeping them here. I've been giving them to –"

"It's not drawings," he interrupts, pulling out another pad to reach the thing that's at the bottom of his bag. "I had an idea this morning. I asked Uncle Jaff to take me out in the boat so I could go scuba diving."

I throw him a weary look to let him know I'm not interested. I don't want to hear about all the fun things he's been doing while we've been stuck in the camp.

"I remembered what you said the other day, when we were at the cove," he says. "I can't help you get your home back, or your old friends, or your dog. There's only one thing I can help you find and that's what I went looking for."

"What?" I mutter. I don't know what he's talking about, right up until he opens his rucksack wide and takes out something I never thought I'd ever see again.

It's Bam-Bear.

His fur is matted and his stuffing's gone all lumpy, but it's nothing that a good combing and a bit of squeezing in the right places won't

fix. Nico passes the teddy through the broken bit of fence and I snatch him up and hold him tight, promising never to let him get lost again. My bottom lip starts trembling as I remember all those family dinners when Bam-Bear sat with us in our snug kitchen, all the holidays he came on, all the times Dada made Pan laugh with stories about him. This bear is one thing we have left from our home country; it's like his stuffing is full of our family memories and his eyes are little mirrors reflecting back all the happy times before the war. Even though he's only Pan's toy, I hadn't realised just how much he'd become part of our family over the years – I feel like I've been reunited with an old friend I thought I'd never see again. Now that he's back in my arms, I can't hold back the tears of joy that run down my cheeks and drip onto his still-damp fur.

"You're happy to have him back, right?" Nico asks, a little uncertain, when he sees me crying.

"Yes," I gulp. "He means more to me than anything. Pan is going to be so excited when she sees him again that she'll smile for a whole year. Thanks, Nico." I put Bam-Bear into my

plastic bag carefully, already grinning at the thought of giving him to her.

He grins back at me and then his smile fades when he looks at the broken bit of fence. "Is that new?" he asks.

It's a bit of a random question. I shrug, not sure why he wants to know. "I think so. I don't remember seeing it yesterday. Why?"

Nico shuffles uncomfortably, like he's about to tell me something he knows he shouldn't. Then, he says, "I heard my dad talking to a big group of workers down at the harbour this morning. They were saying that closing the camps isn't enough; the only way to get the tourists to come back and to make sure there are enough jobs for the islanders is to get rid of the camp for good. My brothers weren't happy with the suggestions the rest of the group made, about talking to the council and starting a petition. They left before the meeting ended and then I saw them whispering together down by the generator shed where they store the boat fuel. Alina, I think they might be planning something... something really bad."

"They're not the only ones," I say, telling him what I heard the refugees from Regland discussing. Nico looks even more worried when I've finished.

"You think some of the refugees have sneaked out to go and get petrol to light a fire?" he asks me.

"I'm pretty sure that's what I heard them say." I nod. "But you think it's your brothers who've broken in to light a fire with the boat fuel instead?"

Nico nods and then shakes his head, looking confused. "I don't know. But it sounds like someone's going to do something with petrol or boat fuel. Whoever it is, the people in the camp are going to be in danger."

"I have to go and warn Mami and Dada!" I gasp. I'm already running off to the sea of tents, when I hear the chain links rattling behind me. When I turn round, I see Nico scrambling under the fence. He gets his T-shirt caught on a sharp edge and tears it, but he squeezes under to our side without hurting himself. "Nico, what are

you doing?"

"Helping you!" he says breathlessly, looking scared and determined all at the same time. "If my brothers are here to cause trouble, then I have to stop them."

"And what if it's the Regland refugees that are going to cause the trouble?" I ask.

"Then... maybe I can help you find them first," he says, a little less certainly.

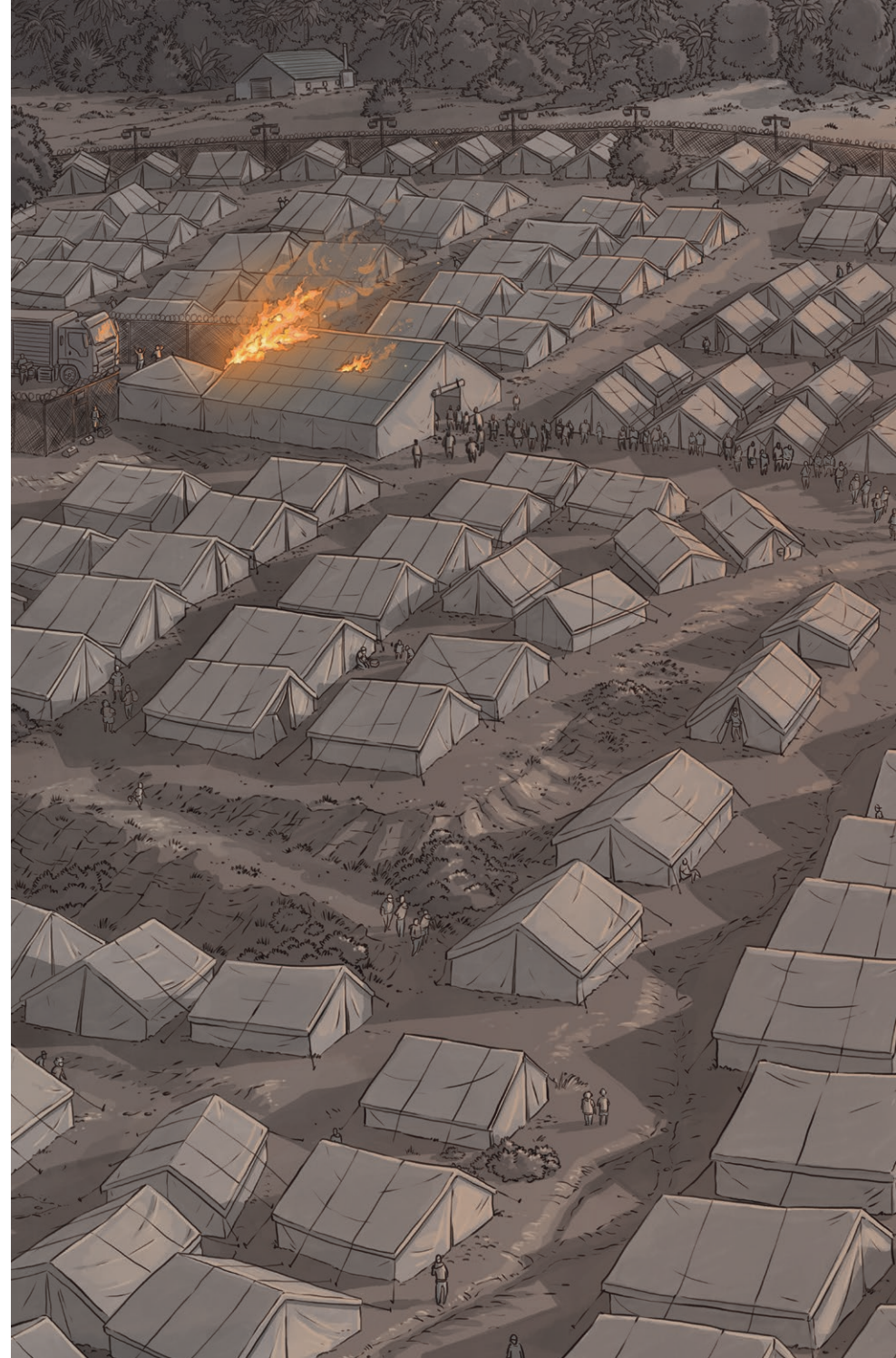
There's no time to argue. We run through the city of tents, looking for signs of smoke and smelling the air for the telltale scent of burning. The searchlights haven't been switched on yet, so it's hard to see clearly in the dim light. The camp stinks so badly of sweat, rubbish and unemptied portable toilets that it's hard to smell anything else. At least it's dark enough by now to give us some cover, which means that nobody notices there's a kid from Trigos running around the camp with me.

We run to the food tent first. The crowd there is huge and it's hard to see anything. People have

given up queuing and are just pushing their way to the front to get to the ration station before the small boxes run out. I can't see Dada there or at the water vats, where there's a big argument by the taps because the last of the water has been used up. We try the administration block next but there are so many people pushing and shoving there to get their forms filled in that I can't get near the building where Mami is helping the Refugee Charity workers.

"What do we do now?" Nico asks. He's looking shocked at the sight of all the people and queues and rubbish. I don't think he realised life inside the camp was this bad. "Should we tell the camp guards at the gate?"

"I'm not sure they'd believe us." I'm just about to suggest we go and talk to Mr and Mrs Stanton in case they know something, when I see a small wisp of smoke rising from the storage sheds behind the big food tent. "Over there!" I cry, grabbing Nico's hand and racing over. By the time we get there, we find flames licking at the doors and roofs of the wooden sheds. There's some kind of liquid spread all over the ground that smells sharp and bitter. Along its shiny



surface, fire is running in little rivers towards the food tent and the administration block.

"We need to warn everyone! Nico, you go and tell the Refugee Charity workers over there – they can speak Dorrican," I order, pointing at the two women who have just come out of the main administration building to talk to the crowd. "I'll go and warn as many people in the tents as I can."

I run straight off, yelling in as many languages as I can remember that there's a fire and that everyone should go to the gates. People look surprised and don't move at first, until they see the flames climb to the top of the storage sheds and the orange glow against the evening sky. That's when they gather up their children and start running for the other side of camp where the guards are standing by the exit. I can only hope they'll also see the fire and let the refugees through.

The first tent I go to is the school tent, searching for my family. When I find Dada there collecting Pan and Gil for supper, I'm so grateful that my legs turn to jelly. "Fire!" I yell at the top

of my voice. "Dada, there's a fire – we have to get everyone out!" When I repeat it in Dorrican for the school teachers, the adults scramble to gather the sleepy children together.

"I have to warn everyone else in the tents!" I yell, thinking of Eddis and Tolia and their parents as I run shakily for the door. Dada grabs my arm before I can disappear into the darkness again. "Take Pan and Gil to the gates," he says, thrusting Gil into my arms before I can argue. My little brother's half asleep in the heat; he whines and buries his head in my neck to hide from all the noise and confusion. "But Dada, I have to –"

"Alina, you're the oldest – I'm relying on you!" Dada says. It's enough to bring me to my senses. Going around the tents is a job for the grown-ups like him. But I have one that's just as important.

I hold Gil tight, making sure Pan has her arm around my waist as I help the volunteer teachers lead the children out. There's no time to give her Bam-Bear just yet. The smoke is covering half the camp and the flames are spreading across

the now-empty food tents and administration block, licking at the edges of the tent city. Nico's done his job well and all the people from that side of camp are heading for the exit. When the searchlights blink on, I can see that the gates are wide open and the guards are directing everyone down the hill to safety. Looking back for Dada and Nico as we pass through, all I can see is smoke. It's not like the soft mist that used to rise from the lake by our cabin on autumn mornings. This smoke is thick and grey. Instead of fresh morning dew, it stinks of charred wood and burnt canvas.

"Alina, thank goodness!"

Mami's helping Refugee Charity workers direct the people out of the camp and down the road, her voice already hoarse with shouting translations. Her eyes light up in relief when she sees us.

"Mami, Dada's still in the camp warning people to leave!" I cry.

Mami's lips go tight. "Take Pan and Gil to wait at the clifftop," she says, trying not to look

worried for my sake. "And don't come back up here, Alina, not for any reason. I need to know that you're all safe."

I nod and keep walking. I'm not sure I could get back into the camp now, even if I wanted to. There are so many people coming out and heading down the road it's like we're a river – and I'm not strong enough to swim against the current.

When we get down to the bottom of the hill, we cross the road and find a spot on the grass to sit and wait. The whole clifftop is filled with anxious people all looking back up the hill to where the sky above the camp is bright orange. Police vans and fire engines scream past us to deal with the blaze, their lights flashing red and blue in warning. I can't help feeling angry that the refugees might've been able to do something about the fire themselves before it got out of control if there had just been enough water in the camp.

"You made it!" a voice says behind me. When I look round, I see Nico grinning at me. He sits down beside us, putting his summer jacket

around Gil to keep him warm in the cool sea breeze. I'm grateful he's waiting here with us instead of going back home when I'm feeling so scared and alone. There are still people flowing down the hill, crowding onto the clifftop with the belongings they managed to rescue. I wave when I see the Stanton family coming towards us.

"Did you see my father?" I ask.

"Yes," Tolia says, giving me a hug and trying not to wake Gil up. "He's the one that warned us about the fire."

"Don't worry," Mrs Stanton says, giving my arm a squeeze. "He'll be down soon."

I hope so. Pan's eyes are glazed; she's staring back up the hill so hard she's barely blinking. There's a big knot of fear in my stomach that gets tighter and tighter as the flow of people starts drying up. Soon, there's a trickle and then just a few slow drips. Finally, there's no one coming down at all except a Refugee Charity van with bright lights that stops by the side of the road.

"I have to go back up to look for Mami and Dada," I decide, shifting Gil over so he's sitting in Nico's lap instead. "Mrs Stanton, could you look after –"

"Look!" She points over at the van. Mami and Dada are getting out. Dada's coughing a bit and his T-shirt is smudged with soot, but they both look fine.

When Pan runs over to give them a hug, I'm only a few steps behind her. "I thought you weren't coming back!" I gasp, flinging my arms around both of them and holding on like my life depends on it.

"We're all safe and we got everyone out," Dada says, his voice dry and crackly. "The emergency services are dealing with the fire. Well done, Alina. Your early warning saved us all."

"It wasn't just me," I say, pointing over at Nico. "I had help."

Nico waves back at us. My parents smile when they see Gil fast asleep in his lap, his hair all sticking up with sweat like he's a baby hedgehog.

That reminds me of something else. I hold up the plastic bag I've been carrying all this time. "It's not just the refugees Nico helped save. He saved someone else too. Guess who that is, Pan?"

Pan's holding on to Mami and Dada, too upset to answer. She just shrugs at me like she doesn't care about anything any more. I want her to still be a little girl and believe in magic stories like she used to before the war and the awful camp. I can't stand to see her so lifeless and mistrustful. So, I tell her the rest of her teddy's story, giving her the fairy-tale ending instead of the real one.

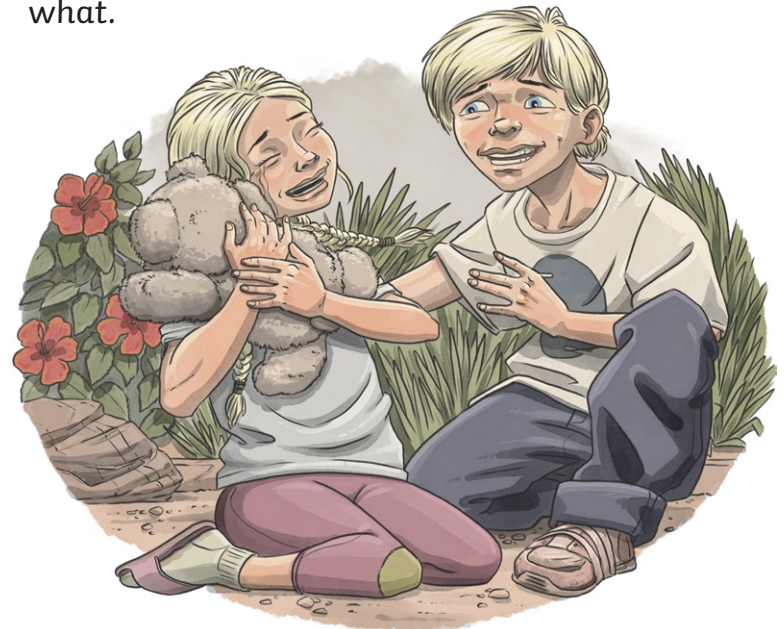
"Bam-Bear's been having fun at the bottom of the sea, living in crab castles and singing songs with the mermaids. But he was missing you," I say. "He sent the dolphins to go and find Nico to ask him if he could come back to the island on Nico's boat."

Pan's eyes narrow, like she's desperate to believe me but can't stand any more false hope. I open my bag. "Nico gave Bam-Bear a lift in his boat back to you. He's a bit damp after all the fun he had in the sea world. But he knows you'll brush

his fur and make him handsome again."

When I take her teddy out of the bag and hand him over, a spark flashes in Pan's eyes, her face lighting up with joy like she's coming back to life. "Bam-Bear!" she cries, hugging him to her chest and grinning so hard it makes us all laugh with happiness. I smile at Nico; he gives me a thumbs up back.

I thought I'd lost everything in the war. I was wrong: I still have my family. Now, I also have a new friend I know I can count on, no matter what.



CHAPTER ELEVEN



I thought anything would be better than living in the refugee camp. I was wrong about that as well. Now that it's burnt down, we're finding that living on the clifftop with no shelter isn't much fun either. Luckily, news of the fire has attracted the attention of other countries who weren't interested in us before. This morning, several helicopters with TV crews landed alongside the harbour where the emergency aid trucks were being driven off the ferry. They interview lots of people from the camp, actually listening to our stories instead of just talking about us. When the Dorrican TV channel crew hear that Nico and I were the ones who first saw the fire and warned everyone, they want

to talk to me.

They ask me lots of questions about life in Lapagonia and life in the refugee camp, filming me up close to get pictures of my grubby clothes and soot-stained face. But when they ask me questions about the war, Mami interrupts and tells them she doesn't want them asking me about anything that will upset me. They ask me about Nico instead – where we met and how we became friends. I tell them about him finding Bam-Bear and about his Uncle Jaff giving Dada work in his boatyard so we can buy food. They ask me where Nico lives as they want to interview him too. I don't tell them, because I don't think his dad and brothers would like him talking on TV about being friends with a refugee.

Then, they ask if we can take them to the boatyard to talk to Jaff instead. Dada agrees to go with them so he can thank Jaff on camera for what he's done. We're halfway to the boatyard when I have another idea.

"Can we stop off at Mr and Mrs Papidos's shop first?" I ask the TV crew. "There's something I

want to show you.” When I tell them what it is, they look interested and ask me where the shop is. I lead them up the hill, smiling at the friendly way the bell tinkles when I open the door. Mr and Mrs Papidos are filling boxes with food and juice bottles to bring to the refugees when we arrive. The TV crew film them doing that for a while, until I tell them there’s something else I want them to see.

That’s when I show them Nico’s drawings. I knew they’d get ruined at the refugee camp and so I gave them all to Mr and Mrs Papidos instead. They’ve got a blank bit of wall behind the counter that they’ve covered with his pictures and put a little sign above saying ‘Local Artist’.

“People have been asking every day if they’re for sale,” Mr Papidos says. “Your friend’s first art display has been a real success, Alina.”

That makes me a bit sad, as Nico doesn’t even know his pictures are here and that people have been admiring them. When the TV crew ask me what the matter is, I tell them that Nico wants to go to the art college in the Dorrican capital when he finishes school but his family can’t

afford it. Then, the crew take lots of shots of his pictures, focusing on the sunset in oil pastels, the pencil drawing of the seals in the cove and the sketch of Jaff and Dada in the boatyard.

When they’ve finished, we go down to see Jaff. There’s a lot of activity at his boatyard where we find he’s been busy phoning loads of islanders to get donations for the refugees. People have been dropping off boxes of clothes, shoes, blankets and tents all morning, which he’s been loading onto his pickup truck to take to the clifftop. The TV crew talk to him and Dada about the refugees and islanders working together, asking me to translate all the bits that Dada doesn’t understand. When we finally climb into Jaff’s truck to get a ride back to the clifftop, I’m smiling from ear to ear about the fact that so many people are trying to help us. I’d thought no one except Jaff, Nico and Mr and Mrs Papidos cared about the refugees. I was wrong: it turns out there are lots of people on Trigos who are trying to make things better for us.

When we get back to the clifftop, there are even more islanders there helping the Refugee Charity



workers to hand out tents and food. I don't see Nico among them, even though I stand on my tiptoes and look over all the adults' shoulders. Jaff guesses who I'm searching the crowd for – he tells me that Nico's been grounded by his dad for going to the refugee camp the other night. He says the family are just worried about his safety. I hope that's true and he's not getting shouted at by his brothers for helping us.

The rest of the day is spent in a bustle of activity, with tents being put up, sleeping bags and food being handed out and families going down to

the beach to wash in the sea. Gil isn't happy about that at first and keeps running away from the waves breaking on the shore. Then, he gets his feet wet and he finds the water's really warm. In the end, he enjoys splashing about so much that Mami has to bribe him with a packet of Mr and Mrs Papidos's biscuits to get him to come back to our new tent. Even though he holds on to Mami's hand the whole way and asks to be picked up when we get back to the crowds, he's looking a lot happier now that there are no gates or guards with guns here.

Pan's decided she's mayor of the clifftop campsite and Bam-Bear is her deputy. She's been marching around issuing orders like 'All tents should have movie screens and bathtubs for teddy bears.' She keeps demanding 'Free ice cream for everyone for breakfast.' The TV crew think it's really funny and they've been filming her like she really is the VIP in charge of us all.

Before the crews go, Mami helps the Stanton family tell their story to the cameras. They want to know what it's been like for the children – so Eddis and Tolia tell them how they felt about being locked up in the camp for nearly

a year with no school and not much food. No one mentions how the fire was started. I don't know if that means they don't know anything about it and it wasn't the group from Regland. I don't ask, though. I know it was a bad thing to do and it could have got a lot of people hurt. But I also know how terrible life in the camp was. And if it really was Nico's brothers, then I'd rather not know that either. I don't want to be angry at them, not when they've lost their mother and Nico's been so kind to me.

When our new tent has been put up and the TV crews leave, we sit with the Stanton family on the grass, eating curried fish and yams from the donation boxes and talking about what's going to happen next. My parents think the government in Dorrica will have to give us homes on the mainland now. The Stantons disagree and say accidents have happened in the camp before and it won't make the government process our asylum forms any faster. Pan settles the matter by telling us she's going to be the next prime minister of Dorrica and Bam-Bear will be her second-in-command. Then, there will be no more camps – everyone who wants to can live on the mainland in a nice house with a flower

garden and an adventure playground.

"Don't forget the free ice cream for breakfast!" Gil says. Everyone laughs when Mami translates that into Reggish too.

It's much cooler out here on the clifftop. With the sound of the sea soothing the crying babies and no searchlights sweeping over us every few minutes, it's much easier to get to sleep in our new tents.

The next day, there's good news and bad news.

When a big group of people arrive on the midday ferry from the Refugee Charity's headquarters on the mainland, they set up an administration area on the clifftop. Mami and some of the other refugees help them to translate for the long queues of people who line up to hear what's going to happen next. Some of the refugees go back to their tents and sleeping areas looking happy; some of them look sad. What worries me is that some of them look angry.

Dada's one of the ones who come back looking happy.

"We're getting out of here!" he grins, lifting Gil up and swinging him around until Gil's giggling with excitement. "The government has granted asylum to everyone from the countries affected by the war – Lapagonia, Terrus and Darvania. We'll be given ferry tickets to the mainland by the end of the week!"

What's even better is that Mami has been offered a job on the mainland working with the Dorrican Refugee Charity because she can speak so many different languages. That means we'll get to go to the city, after all, and I'll have a chance to study medicine at the big university there one day. Dada hugs Mami, telling her how proud he is of all the unpaid work she's been doing in the camp. Pan cheers, happier than I've ever seen her look since the start of the war. Now that she's brushed his fur and plumped up his stuffing, even Bam-Bear's looking happy at the news.

But when I run to find Eddis and Tolia, I find they're in the group that are looking sad. Their father's looking angry; he just snorts and walks away when I tell them my family are being moved to the mainland. "Aren't you coming

too?" I ask them.

Tolia shakes her head. "They've decided most of the asylum seekers from Regland are economic migrants rather than refugees. They're sending a lot of them home."

"You mean you have to go back there?" I cry. "That's terrible! Don't they know there's no food and no jobs?"

Eddis shrugs. "I'm not sure they care. As long as people aren't running away from war, then other countries don't want them. But it's not so bad," he says quickly when he sees my bottom lip trembling. "They're not sending the families back – just the people who've come on their own."

"So, where are you going to stay?" I ask. "Are they going to rebuild the refugee camp?"

"Eventually. Probably," Tolia says, not looking sure. "But the government's going to pay for the families to stay in the empty hotels here on Trigos this summer. That's something, hey, Alina?"

I know they're trying to make the best of it to hide their disappointment and so I smile back. Mami says it isn't fair that families like ours are getting to start a new life while they'll be stuck here even longer. Even though we came to Trigos for different reasons, we all ended up in the same refugee camp where we were all scared and hungry – so I think we all deserve the same chance at a new life.

Mrs Stanton is sighing and saying that some people get all the luck, making it clear she resents the way her family is being treated differently from ours. Although our lives won't be the same from now on, I hope we can all stay friends when I go to the mainland and they're left behind here.

I walk back to my family's tent slowly, wondering why the government thinks my family deserves a new home but Eddis and Tolia's family doesn't. I'm so deep in thought that I don't hear my name being called until a hand touches my shoulder. When I turn round, I can't help smiling again.

"Nico! I thought your dad wouldn't let you

come here."

"He said it was OK as long as Uncle Jaff came with me." Nico grins back at me, pointing at his uncle, who's having a conversation with Dada by our tent. "And he couldn't say no after what you did for me."

"What did I do for you?" I ask, confused.

"You helped me to get a scholarship to go to the art college!" Nico tells me, looking just as excited as Pan did when she got Bam-Bear back.

"No, I didn't." I shake my head. "How could I do something like that?"

"Here – look at Uncle Jaff's phone. We can watch the news clip online." Nico holds up the phone and plays the video of the special report all about the camp. There's a bit about my family, with Pan pretending she's the mayor. Then, there's a section with Dada and Jaff at the boatyard, with me talking after that about the night of the fire when Nico helped me warn the people in the camp. In the final part about Nico's drawings in Mr and Mrs Papidos's shop,

the camera zooms right in to show how good they are. Over the top, you can hear me saying that Nico wants to go to the art college when he finishes school but his family can't afford it. Nico pauses the video at that bit.

"The art college phoned my dad today," he says. "I don't know how they got our number – they must've phoned the council or my school or something. Anyway, they said as long as I get good enough grades in school, then they'll have a fully paid place for me when I'm ready for it. The local news station even wants to do a feature on me!"

"Nico, that's brilliant!" I grin back, fighting the urge to give him a hug like he's my brother instead of someone I only met for the first time a few months ago. "Has your father said it's OK?"

Nico nods. "I don't think he was going to say yes to the art college at first, even with the scholarship offer. But then, he talked to Mr and Mrs Papidos. When he heard how much money people are offering for my paintings, he changed his mind pretty quick! Now that he doesn't

need to worry about paying for me to go to art school, he's a lot happier about me spending time drawing."

I laugh at that and then I say more seriously, "What about your brothers? Have they said anything?"

Nico looks a bit uncomfortable at that, as he knows I'm sort of asking about the fire instead of about his art. He decides to focus on his drawing to avoid the difficult question. "Kestof and Riktos were really impressed when they heard I was getting a scholarship," he says proudly. "They didn't realise art could be a proper career. They even apologised for ripping up my sketches – and promised to do some of my work on our fishing boat to give me more time to practise drawing."

I smile and leave it at that. As long as Nico's happy, then that's all I need to know.

That night, Jaff and Nico sit with my family and the Stantons on the clifftop, eating a big picnic of fried seafood and plantain. We don't talk about the government's decision to let some

families go to the mainland and make others stay, and we don't talk about the fact that lots of people here will be sent back home after everything they've been through. We just look out at the sun setting over the sea, laughing about how the food and music and scenery here are so different from home and how we're all going to be talking with Dorrican accents before long.

"Can we stay in touch when you go?" Nico asks me. "Uncle Jaff says I can go with him next time he's got business on the mainland. I could visit you there."

"That would be great," I say. "But could you do something for me when I'm gone?"

"What?"

"Could you help Eddis and Tolia out? They haven't had a chance to learn Dorrican because they've been stuck in the camp. And I know they'd love to visit the cove with the seals."

Even though Eddis and Tolia don't know what we're saying, they know we're talking about

them. They look over at us suspiciously. "What are you two whispering about?" Eddis asks.

"Nico's deciding if he's going to share his very special place with you while you're living in the hotel. You know – the one in the drawing you saw in the news report on Jaff's phone earlier?"

"The place with the seals?" Tolia's face lights up.

I nod. "That's the one." Then, I ask Nico, "What do you think? Will you take them there like you took me?"

Eddis and Tolia wait to see if Nico's made up his mind. When he smiles at them, they both cheer and hold their hands up so they can exchange high fives with him. If there's one thing I've learnt since the war, it's that even people who share a language in common can misunderstand each other. Although Nico, Eddis and Tolia don't speak the same language, they *can* learn to understand each other – all they need is time.

Mami's been helping Jaff translate something to Mr and Mrs Stanton. I just catch the tail end of

the conversation and find out that Jaff's offered Mr Stanton the job in the boatyard that Dada's been doing. When Mr Stanton says 'Yes!', Jaff raises his juice bottle and makes a toast.

"I know you haven't had the best of times on Trigos – and some of you have been here far longer than you wanted," he says. "But whatever happens, this is a fresh start and so I hope you all find the happiness you're searching for. To new beginnings," he finishes, clinking his juice bottle against the ones we're all holding.

"To new beginnings," we say back in different languages when Mami has translated his words.

Then, as the sun dips below the horizon and the night wind whispers over the sea, we lie back on the grass to watch the stars come out above the island.

This country isn't home, not yet.

But my family is with me and we have new friends who care about us. So, maybe if I'm very lucky, I'll make as many happy memories here as I did in the country I've left behind.



GLOSSARY

Page Number	Word or Phrase	Definition
5, 59	asylum claim	When a person asks the government of a different country for protection or safety.
37, 167	asylum seeker	A person who flees their home because they do not feel safe there and is seeking safety in a different country.
3, 4, 27, 52, 75	border	The line that separates or divides one country from another.
4, 52	border guard	A person who guards a country's border.
multiple instances	dinghy	A small, open boat.
45, 161, 164	donation	Something given to a person or an organisation to help them.
25, 26, 37, 167	economic migrant	A person who leaves their country to find a job, or a better-paid job, to improve the amount of money they can earn or the quality of life they can have.
multiple instances	government	The group of people responsible for controlling a country.

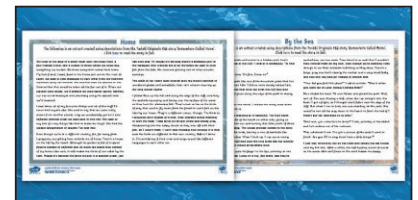
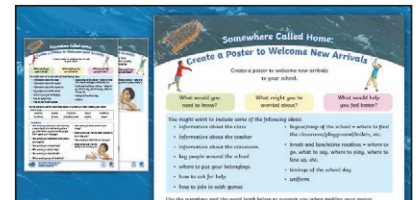
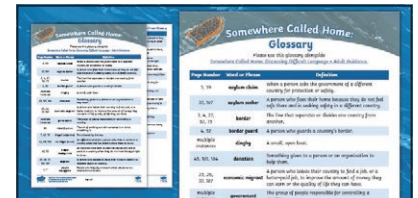
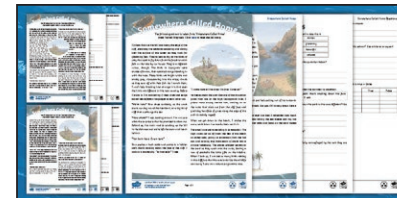
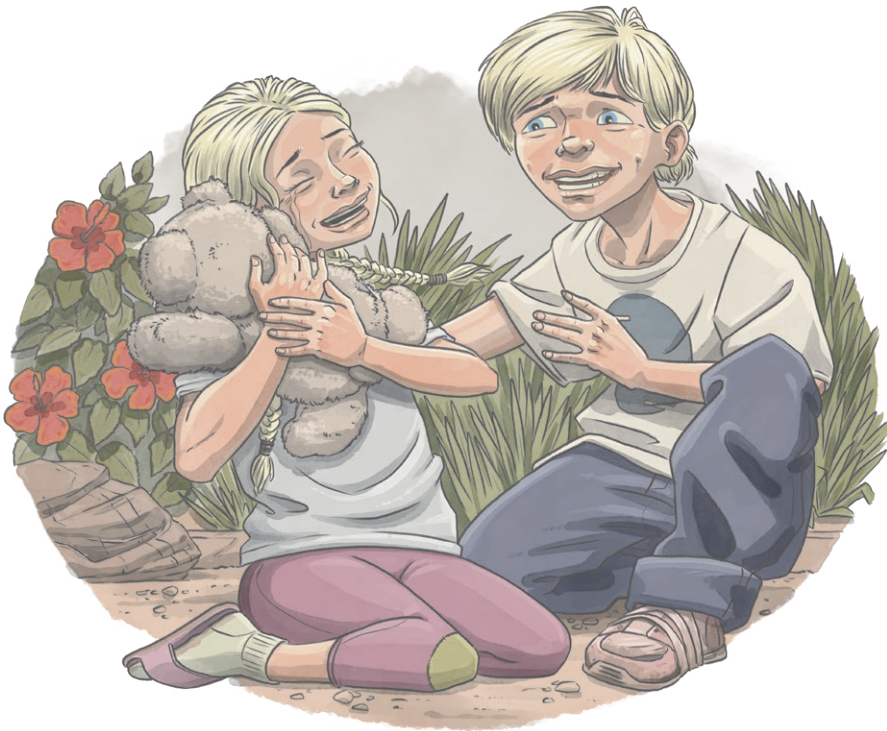
Page Number	Word or Phrase	Definition
84	identification	The act of working out who someone is or what something is.
7, 43, 92	illegal (adjective)	Not allowed by the law.
42, 58, 105	an illegal (noun)	An offensive word for a person who lives or works in a country when the law doesn't allow them to do so.
43, 92	illegal immigrants	An inappropriate term to describe people who live or work in a country when they do not have the legal right to do so.
25, 26, 37, 132, 167	migrant	A person who decides to leave their home to settle in a different region or country.
4, 7	people smugglers	People who illegally transport other people across international borders.
21, 22, 35	ration book	A book from the government that allows people to buy food when there is a shortage, usually during or after a war.
66, 78, 130, 132	rations	A fixed amount of something you are allowed to have, e.g. food or fuel, when there is a shortage.

Page Number	Word or Phrase	Definition
multiple instances	refugee	A person who flees their home and crosses an international border because their life is in danger.
multiple instances	refugee camp	A place where refugees can live for a limited time, which provides shelter, food, water and basic services.
27	religious police	A group that check the people living in a country follow a certain religion and its specific rules.
42	taxpayers	A person who pays tax, which is money to pay for public services, e.g. healthcare.
multiple instances	the mainland	The main area of land belonging to a country, not including any islands.
3, 8	to flee	To leave a place quickly, usually due to danger or fear.
3, 17	to invade	To enter a place by force in order to take control of it.
7, 36	translator	A person who translates speech or writing into a different language as their job.

Page Number	Word or Phrase	Definition
126, 127	vandalism	The crime of deliberately damaging something belonging to other people.
151	volunteer	A person who does something willingly without being paid or forced to.
multiple instances	war	Armed fighting between two or more groups or countries.

We've created a wide range of materials to support teaching on this book.

Visit [twinkl.com/originals](https://www.twinkl.com/originals)





We're in the middle of the sea with nothing but a few bags of clothes left and a leaky dinghy to cling on to.

Alina and her family have been forced to flee their country to escape war. Their whole lives packed into four rucksacks, they are faced with hostile border guards, meaning they must make a long and perilous journey to the coast.

Now, about to arrive on the small island of Trigos, Alina is hopeful of starting a new life away from danger, in a place where they'll be welcome. But when a fishing boat almost sinks their dinghy and angry voices shout at them to go back, it seems that nowhere is safe.

Will Alina and her family ever find somewhere to call home again?



visit [twinkl.com](https://www.twinkl.com)

We help those who teach.

We provide educators around the world with entire schemes of work, lesson planning and assessments, plus online educational games, innovative augmented reality and lots, lots more.

