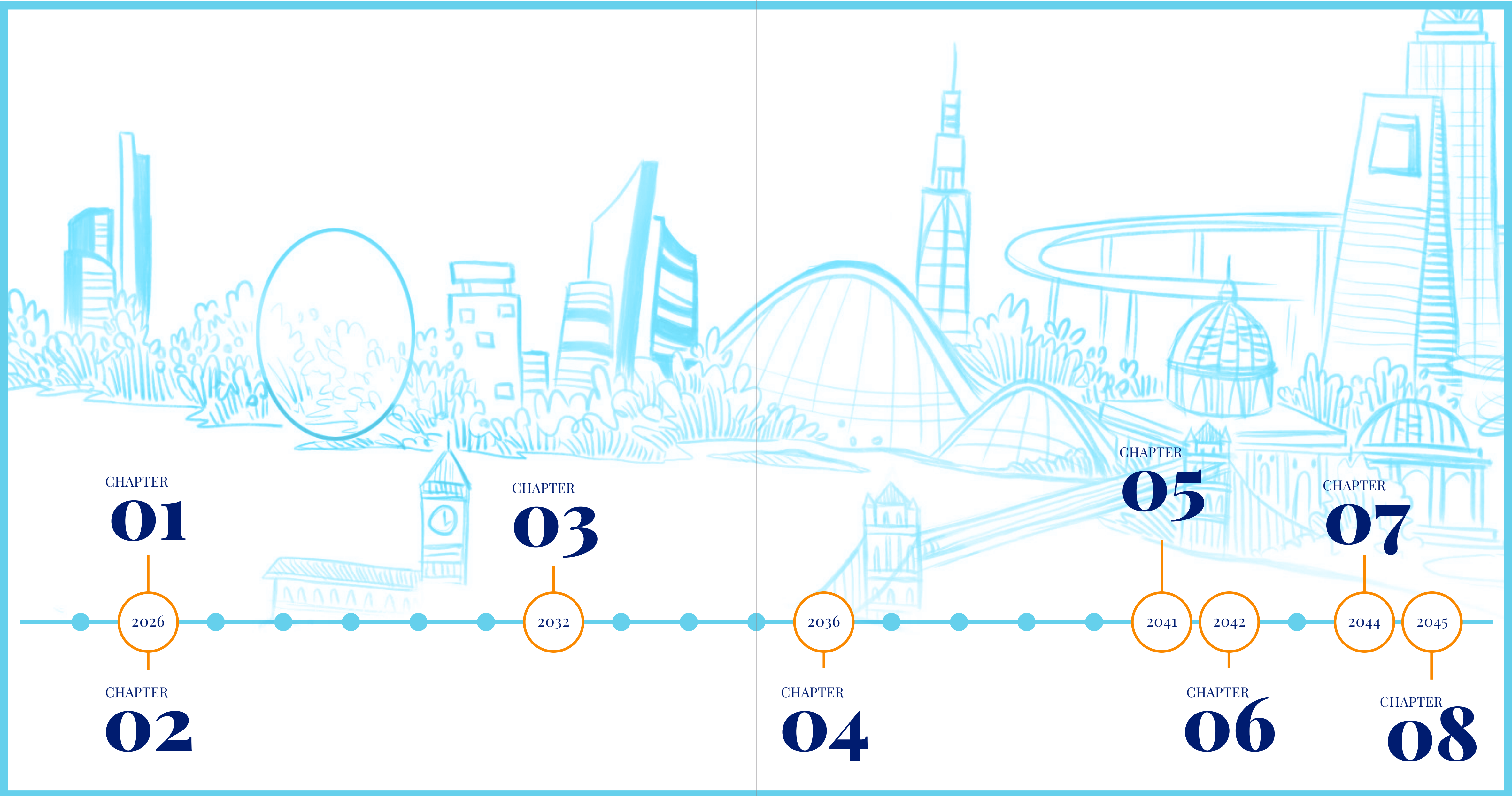


An illustration of five children of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. They are all holding up a large, glowing, translucent cube that is suspended in the air by thin lines. The children are smiling and looking up at the cube with admiration. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color. The title 'Andre's Story' is written in large, white, serif font across the center of the image.

Andre's Story

WRITTEN BY Kathleen Goonan • ILLUSTRATED BY Alina Chau • LITERACY CONTENT BY Dr. John Comings



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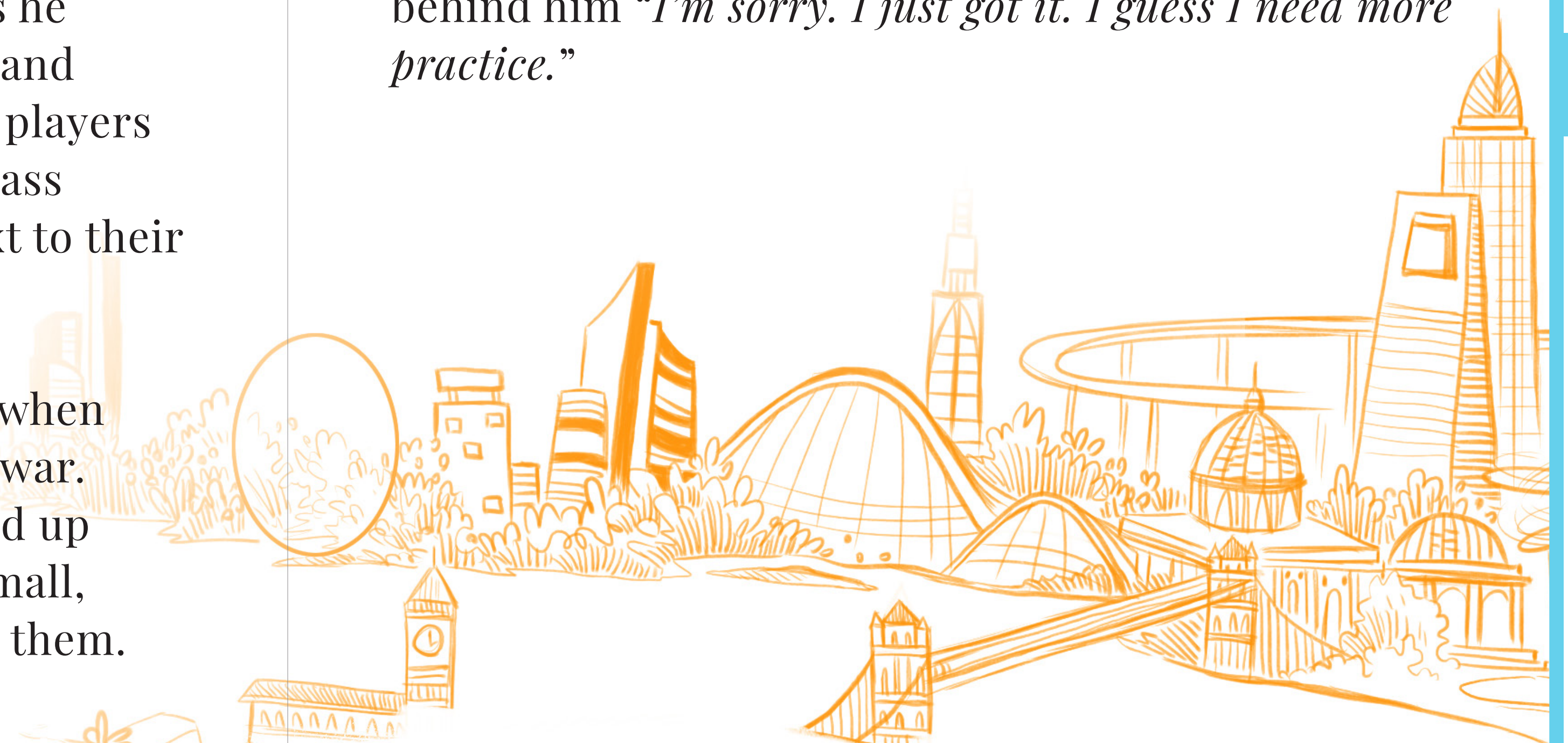
London, 2026

Andre ran out of the repair shop where his father worked into the fresh spring air. He sprinted down to the park at the end of the street. As he ran onto the grass he dodged dogs, joggers and skateboarders as he headed for the football players on the far side. He avoided the stretch of grass where mothers and nannies sat reading next to their babies' prams.

Andre's baby brother and mother drowned when his family fled their country because of the war. The boat they were squashed into had tipped up and they fell out. He could not look at the small, sweet faces of babies without remembering them.

"Hey, watch out! Mr Speedy is here!" one of the players joked as Andre joined the football game. He got in a good kick before one of the big kids knocked him down. The bully stood over Andre, laughing.

Andre jumped up readnd ducked. The drone struck his forearm hard and fell to the ground. The engine sputtered and then became silent. He heard a voice behind him *"I'm sorry. I just got it. I guess I need more practice."*



Andre looked up. A girl with wild black hair in pigtails and wide, brown eyes bent over him. She was clutching the drone's remote and looked worried.

"Are you all right? Your arm is bleeding."

"I am okay."

Andre stood up and wiped the blood off on his shirt. His arm stung a bit, but worse things had happened to him on the journey from their country. He was much more interested in the girl's big, fancy drone lying at his feet. It was a Hawk: yellow with big blue stripes. The remote that piloted the drone was expensive. Andre knew about drones because his father used to have one in their homeland and taught him how it worked. His father still worked with electronics. Andre tried to persuade his father to buy him a Hawk in London but they were too

expensive. His father could not even afford a tiny drone like the one he flew from the rooftop garden in their village back home. There was no way he could afford a Hawk now.

Andre looked at the girl. He was always careful with strangers because he was a foreigner - a refugee. He felt like an outsider, especially as many people were suspicious of refugees and didn't trust them because they didn't know their stories, and didn't understand why they had to flee their countries. He needed to be particularly polite to stay out of trouble.

The girl had dark freckles scattered across her brown cheeks. He held out his hand and said, *"I am Andre."* He felt tense as he waited for her to say, 'What are you?' That's what so many kids said when they first met him. Instead she shook his hand.

“*I am Toniah,*” she said, smiling shyly as she picked up the Hawk. “*This thing is bent. Do you know how to fly it?*” He wanted to shout, are you kidding? But instead he nodded and just said, “*Yes.*”



Of course, he knew how to fly the Hawk. He watched lots of videos about how to fly drones. He saw a vlog about how drones were made. Before there were drones his father told him that some people flew remote- controlled aeroplanes that they operated from the ground. Those seemed old-fashioned now. He took the drone and carefully bent the metal pin holding the rotor until it looked straight. Then he

put the drone down on the grass and Toniah handed him the remote. He switched it on and watched the screen as the Hawk buzzed up into the air.

The Hawk was like a camera, it recorded everything it flew over. As it passed over something Andre could see that thing on the remote screen in his hand. The ground on the screen looked further and further away as the Hawk flew higher and higher.

As the Hawk flew up, its buzzing sound got softer and Andre became aware of birds singing all around him. Their sweet melodies reminded him of home. He felt the sunshine on his face and smelled the sweet pink blossoms floating down from the trees in the park.

Andre made the drone swoop down towards one of the women with the prams. Andre saw a nanny appear on the screen. As she leaned over a baby, he

got a glimpse of the baby's tiny face on the screen. This time, instead of being painful to see a baby, somehow it felt okay.

The sky darkened as the sun went behind a cloud, but soon the April wind drove the clouds away and it

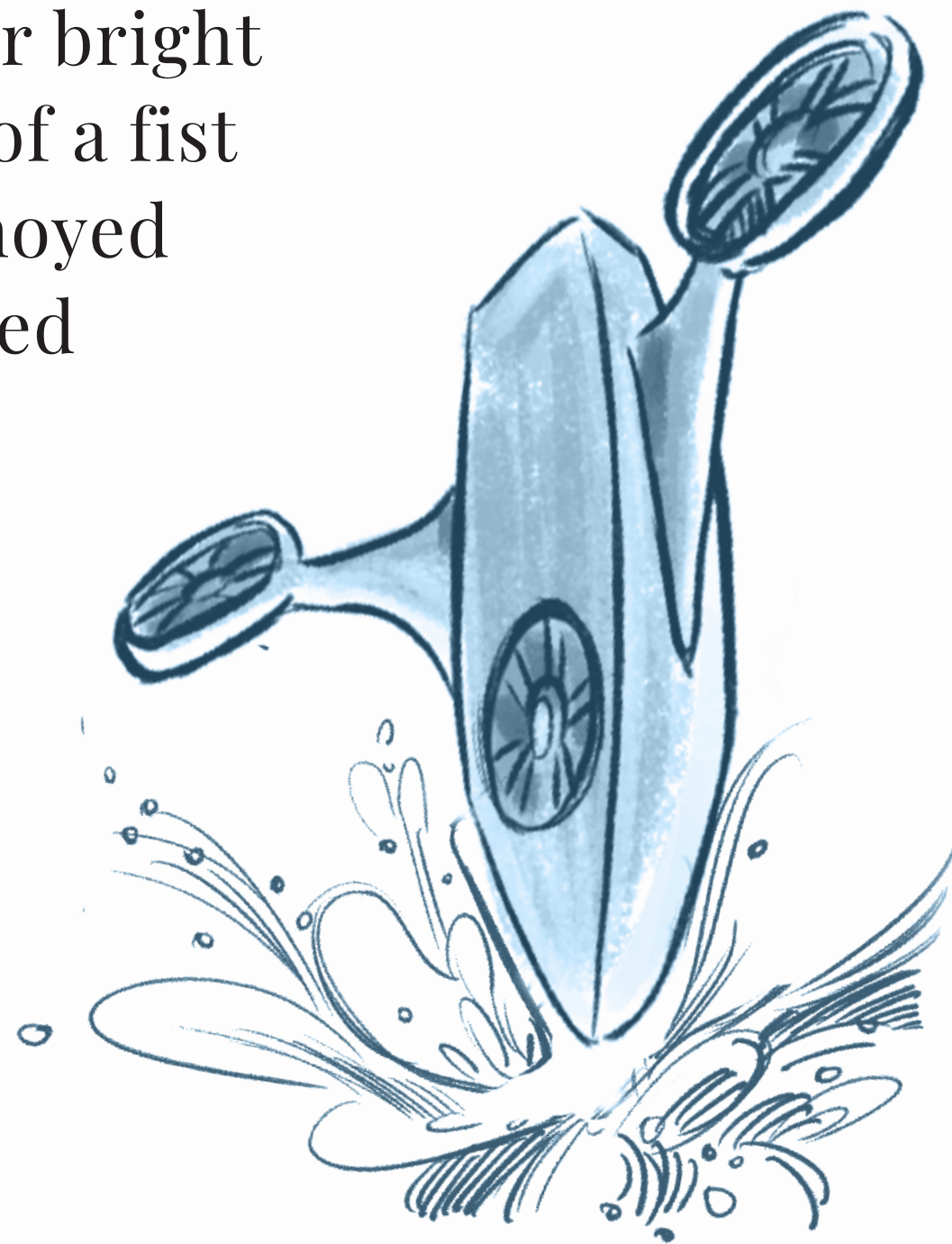
was sunny again. The yellow and blue Hawk danced in the sky up above Andre. It showed him things he had never seen in this new city. Things he didn't know existed now appeared miraculously on the screen as the drone flew over them.



Toniah hopped up and down and clapped. “*Cool! Now steer it back to the park and over the pond!*”

They watched the screen, mesmerised, as the Hawk swooped over the park again towards the pond. Things flashed past on the screen: the swish of a speedy skateboarder, the sprawling students reading on their bright blankets, and the shake of a fist from a soccer player annoyed by the drone as it swooped over the soccer game.

Toniah and Andre laughed as they watched the screen. It seemed to Andre as if he was also up there in the air soaring like the



Hawk. His sad memories of having to flee their home in the village disappeared. Now he felt only the joy of this perfect day.

Then the screen displayed a jumble of images as the Hawk tumbled from the sky, sliced across the tops of reeds on the edge of the pond and splashed into the shallows. “*Not again,*” said Toniah, and they set off running towards the water. Her gumboots were purple with white polka dots and made a clumping sound as she ran.

She waded into the pond, bent down, and lifted a stick from the water. She used it to hook and pull the drone toward her. As soon as she could reach the drone she plucked it out of the pond. Andre waited on the muddy edge. He was really sorry about crashing the drone. He was also quite worried. His father could not afford to replace the drone and it was Andre’s fault; he had steered it into the water.

Toniah sloshed back through the water and joined him. The dripping, muddied machine was covered with water weeds.

“I am very sorry,” Andre said.

Toniah shook her head. *“It’s not your fault. I probably ruined it when I crashed it earlier.”* Her eyes were very kind. *“Please, don’t worry about it.”*

“May I look at it?”

Two rotors on the Hawk were now skew. Andre pointed to where a third was missing. *“It crash when rotor is off,”* he said in broken English. He knew the word ‘rotor’ he had heard it many times on the videos he had watched of drones.

He noticed the thin gap between the top and the bottom of the drone. He twisted the Hawk in two to

open it up. He recognised and understood the inside of the Hawk: the twist of the red and black wires, the connectors, the parts that fitted together. It made perfect sense. He had been watching his father fix electronics since he was a baby.

“I perhaps it can fix...” Andre stammered. Toniah did not seem to notice his poor English.

“Really? That would be awesome.”

He continued struggling to say the English words.

He spoke slowly and carefully. *“I would like to... try. My father fix computers. He can help me.”*

“Cool. Here you go.” Toniah handed him the broken Hawk.

“I come to the park and find you when it fixed.”

“I’ll look out for you. It’s late I need to go now. My mother will want me home.”

“Okay, see you next time.”

He watched Toniah run across the park. She was graceful even though she was wearing clumsy gumboots. Her green dress billowed behind her and her pigtails bounced as she ran. It would be fun to see her again, he thought. He hugged the Hawk close to his chest. He couldn’t believe his luck.

Andre left the park and headed home to Village #7 on the outskirts of London. Village #7 was cramped and noisy, it had been built for refugees, where families were squashed into tiny flats and even tinier houses called pods. The pods were built next to a traffic circle that roared with traffic all night. Andre and his father lived in a pod with one small window. They had lived there for 18 months, since they arrived in London.



On the way home Andre passed his school. It was a refugee school and he was in the first grade. The teachers only taught in English and Andre struggled to understand them and to make himself understood. Often, it was easier not to try. If he said nothing, he would not seem stupid.

The kids in Village #7 came from many places and when he had time to spend with them he heard a mixture of languages all around him. He was used

to this babble of words he didn't understand but he longed for the familiarity of words that he could understand.

When Andre got home he laid out the parts of the Hawk drone on the old table. He felt proud that he helped his father drag the table home from the donation centre. He sat down to do his homework but it was difficult and he dozed off.

Andre's father worked long hours in a computer repair shop. He took English lessons at night. He told Andre that even though he wasn't paid much, he was lucky to have a job at all. He was even luckier to have one where he could work late and on Saturdays

so that he could send money to his mother and the rest of his family who still lived in a village in the mountains of their homeland.

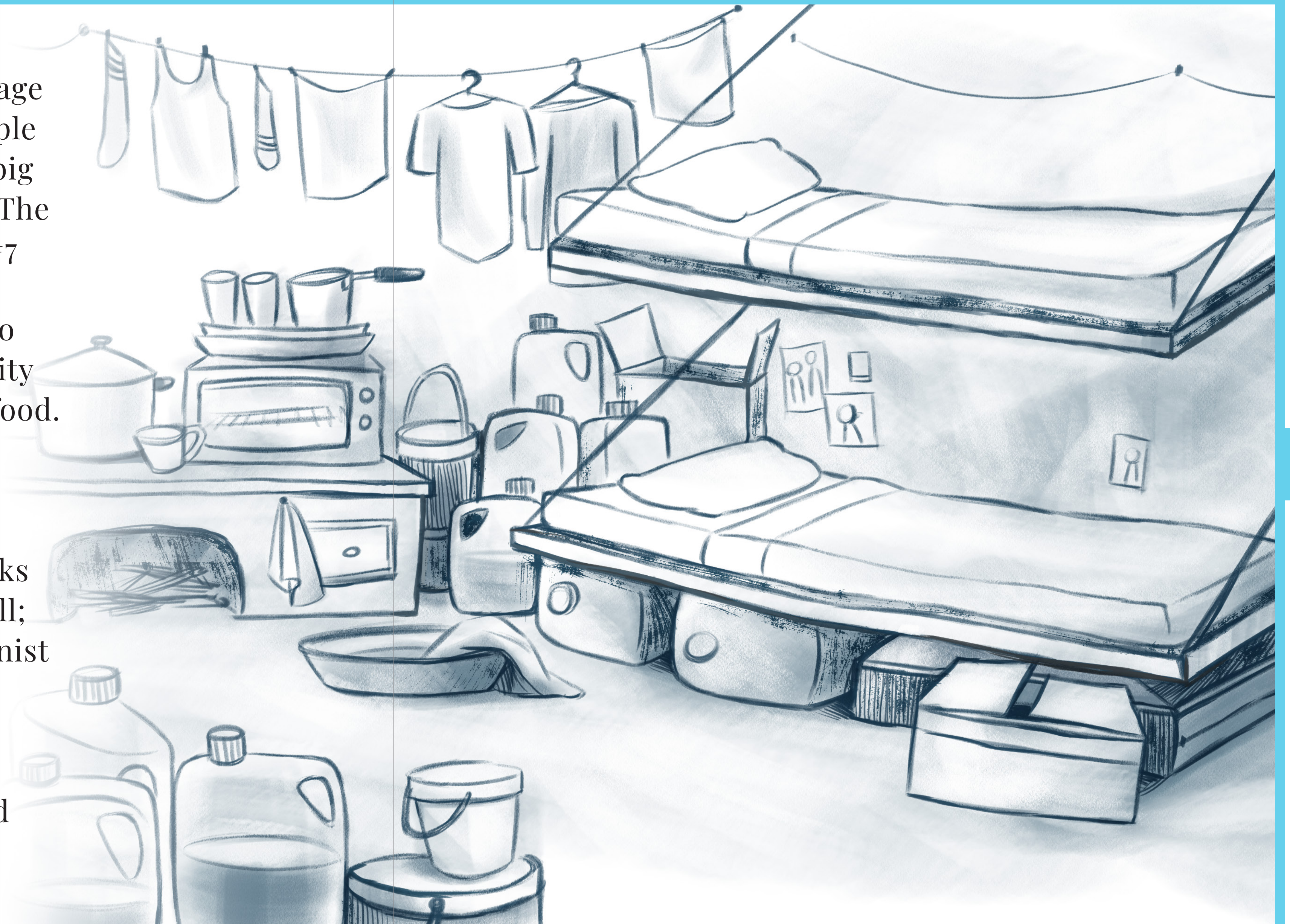
When Andre's father came home late that night from his English class he stared at the Hawk's components that were laid out so carefully on the table. Long shadows cast by the single lamp stretched from each tiny piece of the Hawk. Andre raised his head from his arms when he heard his dad. His homework, which he still hadn't finished, was scattered on pages around him on the table. He followed his father's gaze from the hawk to the plastic containers on the floor. He was checking to see if Andre had done his chores. Andre and his dad spent Sundays tidying up, doing laundry, and getting ready for the coming week.

The containers were full of water, some for drinking, and some for bathing. Andre had many



responsibilities. People in Village #7 were poor, not like the people who lived around the park in big houses and drove smart cars. The refugees who lived in Village #7 didn't have enough money for food and had to stand in line to fetch water from the community tap and stand in line to fetch food.

There wasn't much in the pod but what there was he had to keep spotless: two plastic bunks that folded down from one wall; a microwave that the receptionist at his father's work had given him; three plates, two cups, two glasses, and packages of plastic utensils that completed their kitchen.



But compared to the scary, horrible places they had been on their journey here, this was a safe, healthy and luxurious home.

Andre's father looked back at the Hawk. *"What have we here?"*

Andre began to speak eagerly in Kurdish, but his father held up his hand and said firmly, "English."

Andre sighed. His father was always like this after his English class.

"It is a Hawk."

"Where did you get it?"

"It... is of... to my new friend. Toniah."

"Do you mean that it belongs to her?"

"Yes." Andre told him the whole story. *"We can fix it, can't we?"*

As Andre talked his father carefully hung up his white shirt, pulled on his gray sweatshirt and sweatpants, and made himself a cup of tea in the microwave. Now he pulled the second chair to the table, sat down, and smiled his rare smile.

"Of course, I can order parts at the shop. We will need to troubleshoot first, try and figure out what is broken." He picked up a green card with wires soldered to it. *"Let's hope that the control board wasn't damaged by the water."*

Andre wondered how soon they would be able to fix the Hawk and how soon he would see Toniah again.

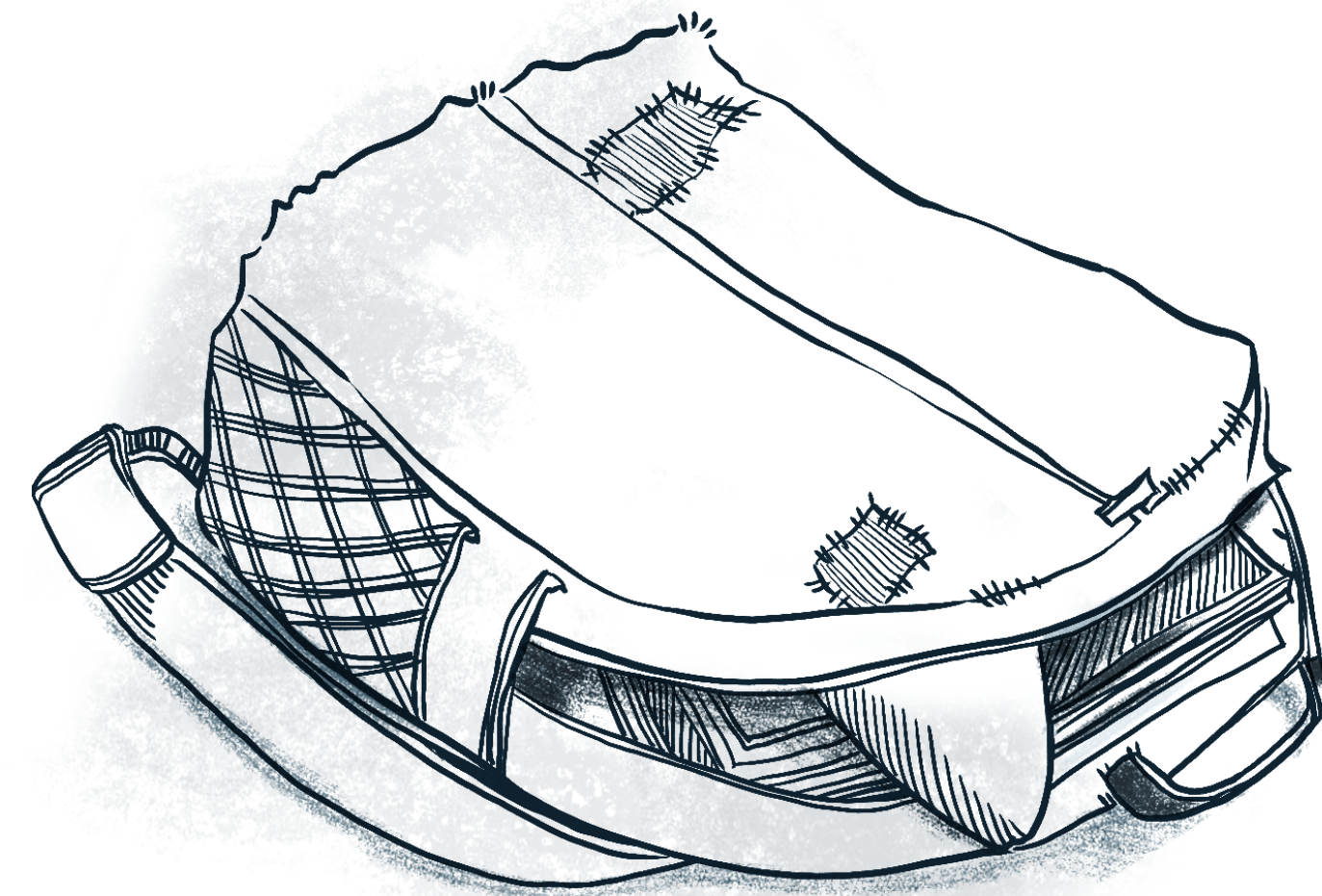




In Chapter 1, Andre met Toniah in the park when she crashed her Hawk drone. They flew the drone together until it crashed again and broke. Andre took it home to fix. He promised Toniah that he would find her in the park again.

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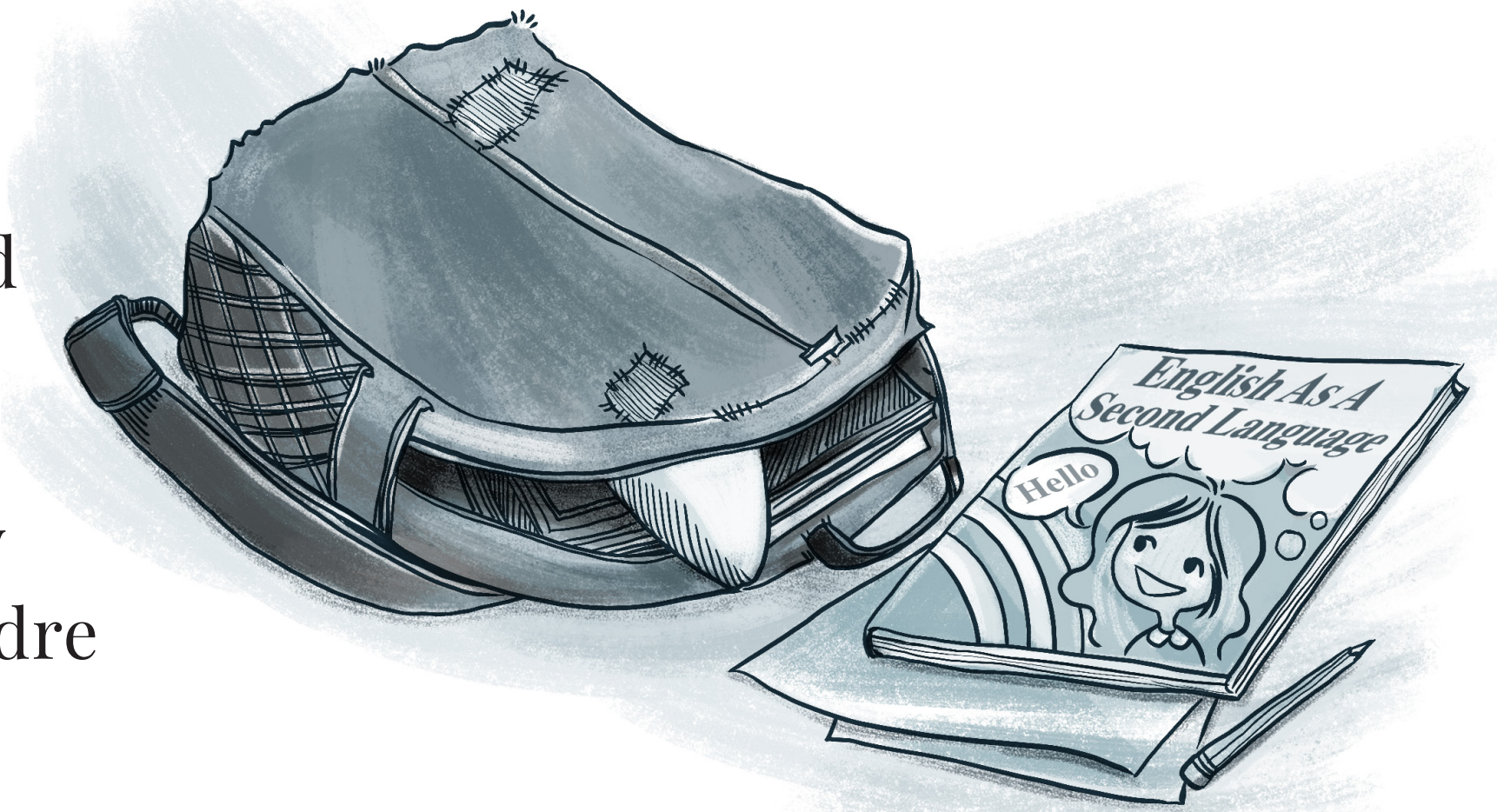
CHAPTER



Central London, 2026

After eating a stale pastry for breakfast Andre slung his backpack over his shoulder, stepped out into the lane, and padlocked the door of his pod. As he walked to school all he could think about was the Hawk Toniah gave him to fix. He wrapped the pieces in an old plastic bag which he carried in his backpack. He also had his battered old English reader and his homework which he hadn't finished. His father often pointed out that he had to make choices and face the consequences. He told him that, even though his school work made no sense now, it would one day when Andre could read and write in English. Sometimes his father fell asleep as he tried to help Andre with his work. Sometimes

he would get angry and tell Andre to think and just try harder. This only made Andre feel bad.



Village #7 did not look like it had yesterday on the Hawk's screen. It was not the sparkling place he had seen reflected from the sky. Each white pod was dirty, and covered with graffiti. Toddlers, dressed in second-hand clothes, played with stones in dirty puddles. The women in the neighbourhood, who were hanging out clothes to dry on lines strung between the pods, kept a watchful eye on them.

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Andre passed the Distribution Centre but the food truck wasn't there yet, it was too early. People stood in line waiting to collect free meals from the truck. Andre felt guilty as he remembered that his trip to the park had cost them a few free meals as he had not stood in line yesterday to collect them. But his father had not complained when he saw the last stale pastry; he had just microwaved a cup of tea, knotted his tie, picked up his computer bag, and left. His father always told Andre that putting on his tie helped him remember who he was. When he got to work, he changed into a mechanic's shirt with his name sewn on it.

Today the sky was gray. A light drizzle fell on the muddy path to school. The beautiful flowering trees of the park seemed like a dream.

Andre arrived late at school and slid into a desk at the back of the classroom. The school was in

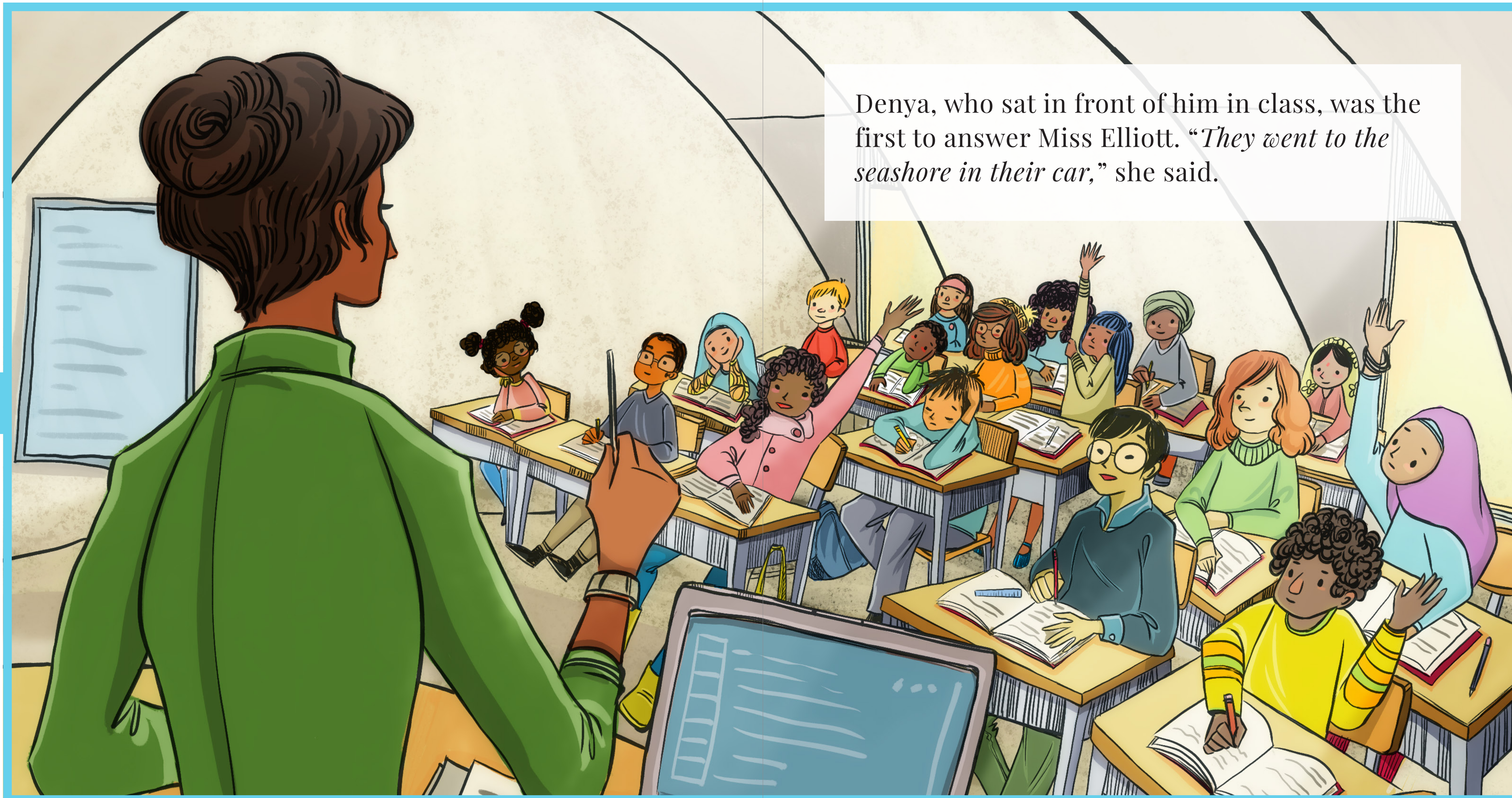
a Quonset hut. The classrooms were divided by panels that could be rolled open and closed. The rooms were dim and cold as there was no heating. Everyone wore their jackets.

Miss Elliott, the teacher, was kind, but she looked disappointed when Andre did not pass his homework to the front of the class so she could check it.

“Class, please get out your reader and open it to the chapter you read last night for homework. Who can tell us what the Smith children did in this chapter?”

Andre could only understand about half of what Miss Elliott said, but he got out his reader and opened it to the correct page. He knew that the Smiths were pale, blond children who lived in a fancy house; he could see that in the pictures. They looked like some of the English children who played in the park; not like the children who lived in Village #7.

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Andre stopped listening. This was not a good story. The seashore was a dangerous, sad place. Thieves took all your money and packed you into a tiny, overloaded boat. People fell out of the boat into the high waves and drowned. That's what happened to his mother and brother.

On the homework paper, he began to draw a picture of the parts of Toniah's Hawk. He remembered exactly the way the wires coiled and how the pins that held the rotors looked. Still, he could not draw them exactly as he saw them in his head. They came out too big or too small or crooked, and he would need a ruler to make them look absolutely correct. He erased his drawing and started again. Then the three hours of school were up. When the teacher let them go, he was first out of the Quonset hut.

Andre ran to his father's work and entered the back of the shop. He waited on a high stool at

the work bench until his father had time for him. While he waited, he tried to read but ended up just turning the pages of his reader because he couldn't understand the words.

Finally, his father finished the soldering job he was doing. He opened his locker and handed Andre their tablet. The shop owners were kind and allowed Andre to use their internet, but his father would get in trouble if he sat down or spent any time with him.

“Use the parts list for the Hawk that we made last night and find the best prices online. I'll order them. Use English online sites,” he said. *“Type in the letters and numbers on the list and see what prices they are. And no shooting games.”*

Andre spent two hours finding the parts online on the tablet; sorting the numbers, which he understood, from the meaningless English words.

Then he watched videos of young men repairing all kinds of drones, including Hawks. He also looked at photographs of his family and his homeland that his father had stored on the tablet. These photographs made him sad: his mother with his brother in her arms, his grandparents in the village, the market where the kind man knew his name and always gave him a free kebab, hot off the grill, as his mother ordered lamb to be delivered for the café.

Then, inevitably, he opened the latest news site from his old city. He listened to the newsreader while images flashed across the screen of mourners wandering amongst ruined buildings looking for lost family members in the rubble.

Nothing like this ever happened in the story they were reading at school.

“Come,” said his father. Andre looked up and saw

that, as usual, they were the last people left in the workshop. *“We have a treat today. Remember Kendal? He has invited us to dinner. The trip on the underground will be very expensive, but we should go.”*

Kendal and his wife, Berfin, were friends of Andre’s father from their homeland. Andre visited them with his father when they first arrived in London. He liked them and enjoyed sipping hot, sweet tea in their flat and speaking Kurdish. Berfin, Kendal’s wife, ruffled his hair and he played with their grandchildren on a beautiful rug that reminded him of his grandmother’s. Neighbors and cousins came and went constantly, chatting, drinking tea, and eating pastries. Berfin and Kendal reminded Andre of a life before London back in their homeland.

When his father talked about their homeland, and Andre’s mother, he would look into the distance as if he could see the past and future. *“We had no choice,”*



he would say. *“We had a good life, but the past is gone. Andre, always remember your brother and mother.”*

Andre could never forget his mother. He still thought about her a lot: how warm and outgoing she was; how she loved to tell stories of when she was growing up and used to help in her parent’s cafe. She was always busy, serving pastries and strong tea and chatting to customers.

Even though she was always busy, she still had time for him. She would stop on her way from the customers to the kitchen just to wipe Andre’s face and tickle him to make him laugh. She was the heart of their family and was respected by the community as a business leader.

His father changed out of his work clothes, knotted his tie and put on his nice jacket before they left the workshop and headed for the underground station.

Andre’s father was different back in their

country; confident and joyful. In his second year of engineering at university he interned at an engineering firm. He was proud of his work there. He still kept an old photograph from that time next to his bed in their pod. He was dressed in a smart white shirt and tie, and looked young and happy, not tired and worried like he did in London.

In their home country, everyone in their neighbourhood spoke Kurdish. Andre's parents, like many in their community, could also speak Turkish. Andre really missed chatting to his grandparents and the older relatives who doted on him. They would tell him stories of his aunt Yisba, who had become a soldier in his home country. A photograph of her was kept on a special shelf at the head of the stairs that led to their living areas. His mother lit a candle for her every evening. He did not know anything about her except that she had been brave and was very beautiful.

Andre thought how different life was in their

hometown. It wasn't at all like the lives of the children in their reader at school. Stories from Andre's hometown weren't written about in English readers.

Andre stopped daydreaming about his old life when they reached the station and went down flights of stairs to the underground trains. It was loud, stuffy and amazing. There were lots of people pushing past each other in the tunnels as they ran for the trains.

Andre wanted to know how they had made these tunnels underground, how the trains were built, how they worked. They didn't have underground trains like this in their country. He asked his father, who explained everything.

They changed trains once. Andre was always scared in the crowds on the underground that he would get lost and be left on his own. He tried to remember every detail of their trip in case he had to make his

way home on his own.

When they reached the surface, it was like a new country. Instead of the cramped housing and narrow lanes of #Village 7 they were on a wide-open street filled with pedestrians. It felt bright and cheerful. People were chatting. The buildings were tall and old. They passed shops and cafés filled with wonderful things that tempted him. But they couldn't afford them. They passed a hotel where men wearing tall black hats opened car doors with white-gloved hands. Kendal and Berfin lived in the next road in a block of flats on the fourth floor. Andre ran up the stairs and knocked on the door.

When they entered the flat, Andre smelled the rich, warm smells of lamb, cardamom and fresh flat bread. He remembered these smells from his mother's cooking. Two tables pushed together over-owed with huge plates heaped with food.

Berfin had long, black hair lightly streaked with



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gray. She was wearing a long purple skirt and a green blouse. She gave him a big hug. Neighbors and relatives were there, laughing and gossiping. Andre played with two babies on the beautiful patterned rug. These babies did not look like his lost brother who had drowned. Something in his heart eased as he played with them. The children, the smells and hearing his own language reminded him of his old life. These children were not like the children in his reader who spoke a different language and lived in different homes.

After they ate, Berfin and his father sat and chatted. Andre heard his name. He moved closer so he could hear what they were saying about him. Berfin was leaning forward. Her face looked serious.

“I am sorry to hear that Andre isn’t doing well in school. If you want my advice as a teacher, this is it: he needs to be taught to read by someone who speaks

Kurdish. He will learn to read easily in the language he already knows.”

His father shook his head, his face stern. *“Kurdish is the past. It may take time, but we both need to learn English. Our future is here. He’s smart. He just needs to pay attention to his teachers. He can do it.”*

“He is very smart,” said Berfin, *“but learning how to read is difficult. He missed a lot of schooling at the age when other children are learning to read and write.”*

“How can he express what he is really thinking and feeling – sadness, loss, love, excitement, joy in a language he doesn’t know? Can you?” She looked at Andre’s father who was frowning.

“To learn to read children need to read stories about children like themselves who live in places they recognise. They need to see their own lives in the

stories they read. Children need to feel that their stories are important.”

She sighed. *“Good people are trying to make the refugee schools work, but they are not good enough. They don’t have enough resources. I don’t know if there are even any Kurdish teachers in these schools, because it is a language that only a very small number of refugees speak.”*

“That is why he needs to learn English,” said his father forcefully, striking his fist on his palm. Andre knew that stubborn look well.

Berfin nodded. *“Certainly, he needs to learn English but reading instructions in Kurdish would make sense to him. He knows the sounds of Kurdish words and this will make it easier for him to learn to read. Once he can read in Kurdish it will be easier for him to read in English.”*

Berfin looked at Andre – she could tell he was listening – and said, smiling, *“Please let me try. I would be happy to teach him for free. He would learn quickly. Just bring him here once a week.”* She laughed and waved at her large family. *“We will gladly make time.”*

Andre rolled a ball back and forth with the babies. He could tell by the way his father nodded politely that they would not come, and that he would not say the reason why. The trip on the underground was expensive. They could hardly afford to come this evening. They couldn’t come every week. His father was proud and didn’t want to take something for free.

A couple of days after their visit to Kendal and Berfin the parts of the Hawk arrived. Andre sat with his father at their table. His father pulled a bag of parts out of his computer bag. Each part was in its own

tiny bag. There was also a tool kit. His father pushed them toward him. “You did very well in figuring out what to order. I only had to add two parts.”

Andre felt proud.

“Now let’s see if we can fix it for Toniah.”

Andre’s father showed him how to use the tiny tools, explained how the battery worked, and sketched a small picture that Andre didn’t understand. It made him feel very good to sit next to his father and work on something.

“Excellent,” his father said when they were done.

“Let’s test it, just to make sure it works.”

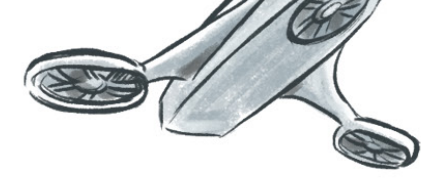
His father added, *“I can’t afford to spend money on data for running the Hawk using the geo-location*

streaming software, but we can download the Hawk’s navigation maps at the shop and then fly the Hawk without a data link. Do you think that would work?”

“I really hope so,” said Andre.

The next day Andre and his father went to the park. Andre couldn’t wait to show the mended Hawk to Toniah, but she wasn’t there. He was disappointed, but he also felt free, strong and happy in the park with his father as he steered the Hawk up into the sky.

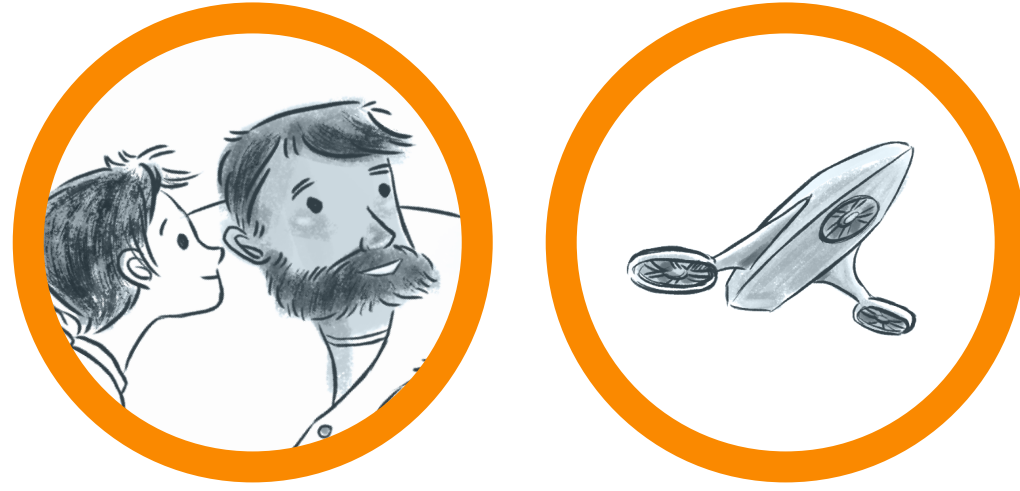
“Look,” said his father, after they had finished flying the Hawk and were sitting on the grass. *“I have an idea. You seem to have a gift for figuring out how things work. You can visualise them – see them in your mind. You understand mechanical things, as I did when I was your age. You learned how to fix the Hawk just by watching videos. Maybe we can set up a little repair business. It’s something you could do when I go*



to English classes. Perhaps you can earn enough money to have your own phone. But,” he said, “You would need to show me that you are doing well at school. You will need to work hard and get good results. Is that a deal?”

“It’s a deal,” Andre said, but he did not know how he would keep his end of the bargain.

As Andre and his father walked home Andre wondered if he would ever see Toniah again to give her back her Hawk.



In Chapter 2, Andre and his father fix Toniah's Hawk drone. They take it to the park to fly but they can't find Toniah. Andre wonders if he will ever be able to give the drone back to her.

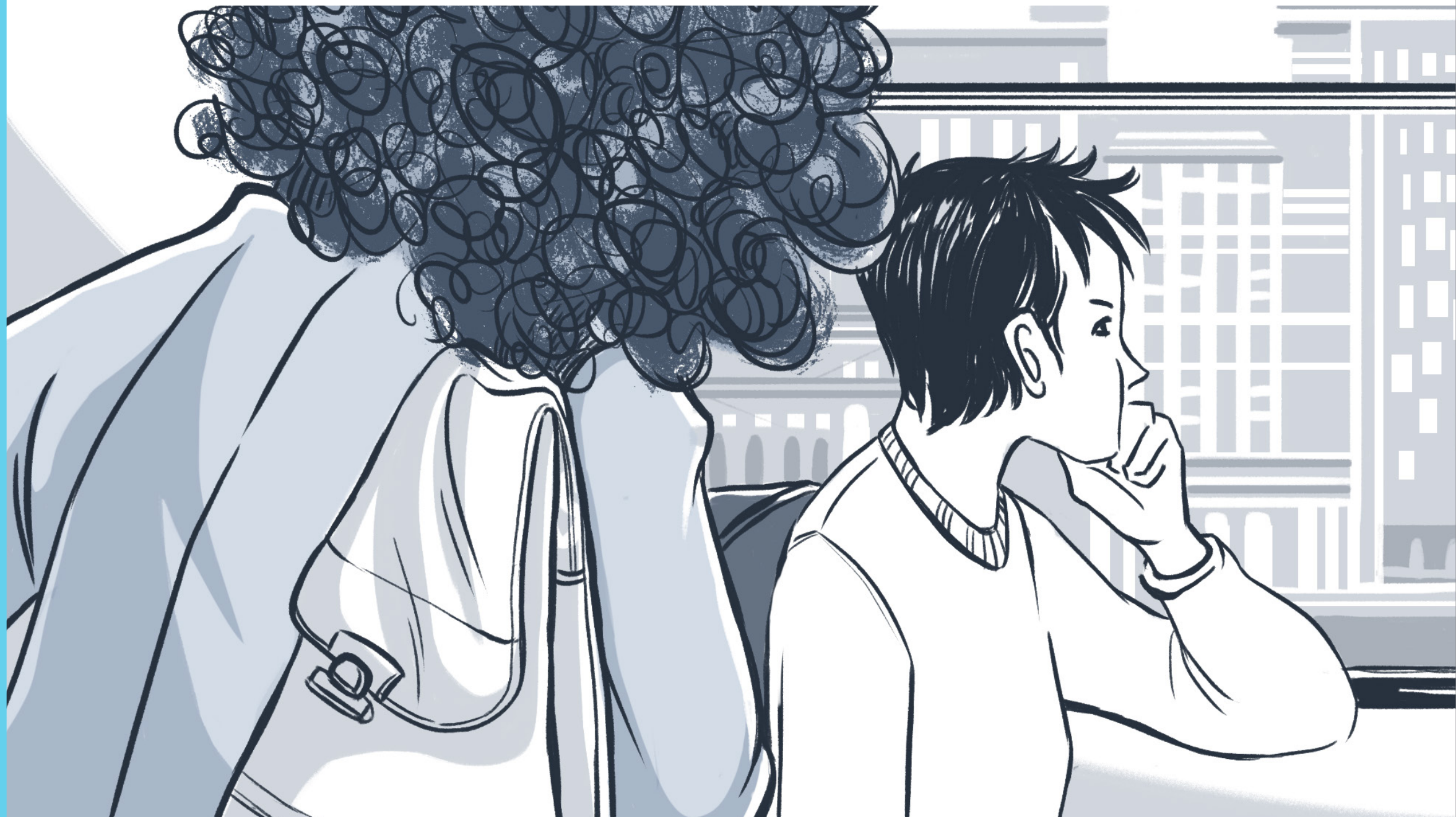
03

CHAPTER



Central London, 2032

Andre was daydreaming on the bus as they passed the park where he had first flown the Hawk all



those years ago. It seemed like another world. He was startled out of his thoughts by a voice behind him. *“Andre is that you?”*

Andre turned around and saw a pretty girl leaning over the empty seat between them. She swung her backpack into her lap and squeezed in next to him. *“It is! This is amazing! I’ve thought about you a lot. I wondered how you were doing.”*

The girl’s eyes did look familiar... those freckles... *“I’m Toniah! Remember the Hawk?”*

“Yes! Toniah!” He was so glad to see her that his shyness vanished. It had been six years since he had seen her in the park. *“I’ve thought about you too. My father helped me fix the Hawk. I really wanted to give it back to you. I was disappointed when you didn’t show up. I kept looking for you in the park, but...”*

“We moved right after that and started going to a

different park.” She still had the same big smile, the same laughing eyes. In fact, Andre decided, she was just the same: friendly, generous, kind. She went on talking as if their meeting in the park was yesterday.

“I’m taking the coolest class,” she said.
“Coding, to build cool internet games. We get to build our own characters. I love it! What are you taking in school?”

“Electronics,” he said. That was just about the only class he went to. So far he had kept his father and his stepmother from finding out that he was skipping most of his other classes. They were a waste of time. Things had changed a lot at school and at home since he last saw Toniah.





The bus slowed down and Andre looked out to see a park just beyond the bus stop. “*Do you have time to get off here?*” he asked Toniah “*I can show you my latest project.*”

“*I don’t know,*” she said. “*My parents told me that this isn’t a safe park, but-sure! Just for a short while.*”

They found a nice place on the grass to sit. Andre took his latest drone out of his backpack and began to assemble it. He had designed it and built it from scratch. It was much more advanced than Toniah’s Hawk.

“What are those little pieces?” asked Toniah. “Baby drones?”



“Watch!” He launched them and showed her the screen. “Try #6.”

She touched the screen. It split into six views as six tiny drones dropped from the steel-grey sky. “Look up,” he said. He made the drones weave and dance. “Forgot,” he said, and turned on the music and lights on the transmitter screen.

“Music and lights. You’ve managed to sync everything! Cool! How did you do that?”

“It’s a secret,” he said, but she made him sit down and explain the programme he had created for the drones. He felt great as he showed her the code; great because she actually understood what he was doing. Hardly any other kids did.

“You should try to get sponsorship to develop this,” she said. “So that you can market it.”

He wasn’t sure what sponsorship was, but it was probably hard to get if you couldn’t read or write in English. Everything was hard in English, but he had long ago stopped imagining that he could learn. He smiled and nodded. “That’s a great idea. Thanks!”

“What do you want to do when you grow up?” she asked, throwing her arms wide as if to embrace the park, the trees, the gray sky, and the world. “I want to be a game developer and help people. But my mother says that because I’m good at Biology I could be a doctor, like her, and help more people.”

“Games help people too,” said Andre.

“That’s what I told her! I want to be an astronaut too, so I’m figuring that out. Maybe I can put everything

together. What do you want to do? You can be anything you want!”

It was a new thought for Andre. All of their time at home was spent by just getting by. There was no time or money to dream about anything different.

Across the park, a family strolled down one of the paths; the mother was pushing a pram and the father walking beside her, a girl and a boy were running ahead. They looked just like his new family.

His father had met someone and they were married not long after they fixed Toniah’s Hawk. It hadn’t taken long for them to have children. Now Andre had two brothers and a sister. His stepmother was nice but she could never take the place of his real mother whom he still missed a lot.



His father was happy with this new family but Andre didn't really feel a part of it. He felt like he was on the outside, watching them. His father gave up on his engineering degree soon after he remarried, when the girl was just a baby. He was different now, more distant. They never spoke of the past. They had moved out their pod and now lived in a rundown old caravan in Village #7. They still struggled.

It made Andre feel good to be able to help out with some of the money he made from repairing drones. But once, a long time ago, he bought his new mother flowers, and she scolded him.

"We need bread," she said, "not flowers."

This made Andre very sad. His real mother loved flowers, she grew pots of them on the rooftop of their old home. She came home with big armfuls of flowers from the market, laughing, her cheeks

bright pink. They were all been happy together back then. No one ever said, there, that one could not have flowers and bread too.

Toniah was right. Helping people was important. He did like helping his family. It made him feel good, and maybe other people would like what he did more than his mother did.

He looked at Toniah and smiled. *"I'm not sure,"* he said. *"I might be an engineer, like my father. Maybe."* He felt the excitement he felt when he was thinking something new. *"Maybe if I was an engineer I could design drones that help people. We could do something together."*

"We could create a game where people use drones to help each other. They could get points to come up with a plan of how to use the drones to do good for others."

“Like delivering medicines or other things people need.”

“Yes,” Toniah jumped from the bench, laughing. “I love it! Andre, there’s a reason we met again. Nobody I know thinks like this. There’s something special about you. Show me #8. You need to give them better names. You could call them Sky Flower or Spin Runner! Turn on the music. The lights. Everything!”

Andre wanted to tell Toniah that there was something special about her too; her enthusiasm, the way she made him feel like he actually could do something important someday. But he didn’t really know how.

As the drones spun and danced in the sky, Andre became aware of someone watching them. He turned around to see a man beneath the trees on the edge of the park. He was standing alone, smoking. He didn’t bother to hide the fact that he was

watching them. Andre felt uneasy, not for himself, but for Toniah. She was dancing on the grass just like she was making the drones dance in the sky. She stopped and staggered for a moment, dizzy, and out of breath. *“This is so much fun!”*

It was getting late when they stopped flying the drones. Andre walked Toniah to the bus stop.

“It was good to see you, Andre.” She squeezed his hand before she climbed on the bus and waved goodbye. Andre wondered if they really would see each other again.

When he walked back across the park he looked for the man under the trees who had been watching them. He was gone.

Andre got home to find his father checking his school books. He looked angry. It wasn’t fair thought Andre.

He knew his English score was still very low but it wasn't because he hadn't tried. He felt hurt as his father scolded him for his poor grades yet again. *"Your math scores are always good, but it's not enough. I thought that once you moved to middle school you would do better at your other subjects. You simply cannot get anywhere in this world without knowing how to read. That is clear."* He slumped in his chair. Andre felt bad.

They sat in tense silence for a while before his father got up and made some tea for both of them. As his father handed him the steaming mug of tea he smiled. He looked tired but not angry anymore.

"I've let you down," said his father. *"I was too focused on trying to finish school myself, and creating a new home for us and a new family. At least you have a mother now, and brothers and a sister."* And a rusty caravan, thought Andre as he sipped his tea, but he did not say anything. His new mother came from

the same country as they did. She was kind to him and he loved his half brothers and sister but it was still hard for him. It hurt to watch his sister doing better than him at school. She didn't seem to have a problem learning to read.

Andre remembered Berfin and how she had said it was important to read about what you knew and had experienced. His sister was being taught to read like that but Andre had never had that chance. Soon after they had last visited Kendal and Berfin she had fallen ill and died.

Then his sister came home, emptied her school books onto the table and showed him her latest story.

"I have my own special words," she told him. *"I tell them to my teacher. She writes them down and I read them back to her. I know the words so it is easy for me to read them. She writes my stories when I tell them to*

her, too. I know the sounds of all the letters.”

“*That’s wonderful,*” he told her but he couldn’t help feeling envious of her reading.

“*I wrote this for you! Read it!*” she had handed him a piece of paper.

“*Andre,*” he began. He knew his own name. “*Is? Mm... um...*”

“*My big brother!*” she said proudly. “*See? Bh-ru-ther. Now you write me a story,*” she said.

“*I would rather tell you a story.*” It was too difficult to write so he told her a story about chickens and weasels that his grandmother had told him long ago in her village. He wished, that he could write one for her, too, and read hers.

“*It’s not too late to learn to read,*” his father said

after Andre had told them the story. “*You can learn whatever age you are. Look at me, I have. Your teachers should have tried harder, taught you like your sister. ‘My Andre is very smart,’ that’s what I told them.*”

His father gave him his disappointed look which always made Andre’s chest tighten with sadness. “*I know that your mother has tried to help you.*”

Andre nodded. “*She does.*” But the truth was mostly his stepmother just told him to try harder, and acted embarrassed in front of other people when he couldn’t read. He also felt embarrassed when other people saw that he couldn’t read.

“*You must learn to read. I’m going to hire a tutor,*” his father said. Andre felt good about that.

Later, he heard his parents arguing. His sister and

brothers were growing fast, needed new clothes and shoes all the time. It wasn't easy to feed a family of six on a computer technician's salary. *"With just a little more money, we could move to a real flat and live like human beings,"* said his stepmother. *"And better schools. Andre needs a better school too."*

"I think he needs something right now," said his father, but he sounded defeated rather than determined.

Andre realised that the tutor idea was going the way of the flowers. That was all right with him. He loved to see his sister's delight in new clothes; loved to give his brothers new toys. He was proud of being able to help them out. There were more important things than spending money on a tutor who would probably be a waste of money. He only wished he could do more.





In Chapter 3, when Andre is sixteen, he meets Toniah again on a bus. They go to the park and chat about their dreams. A strange man watches them from the trees as they fly Andre's drones.

04

CHAPTER



Central London, 2036

It was a warm spring day and Andre was in the park flying his drones. He came to the park often hoping he would see Toniah again, but years had passed with no sight of her. Perhaps her parents had told her that the park wasn't safe and had forbidden her to come here.

Andre made his drones swoop in circles and then brought them in to land. He was adjusting the settings on one of them when he noticed a man standing close-by. It was the same man who had been watching him and Toniah that day in the park. Now he was standing with one hand on his hip staring at Andre. He was wearing a smart shirt and

smoking. After Andre re-launched his drones he came over and introduced himself.

"I'm Edward. You have a talent. What's your name?" he asked Andre.

Andre tried to ignore the man but he persisted. The man tossed his cigarette onto the ground and let it smoulder. *"You know a lot about drones. I have never seen any like the ones that you fly. I think that you are brilliant. Do you suppose one of those could carry any weight?"*

Andre liked technical questions and he couldn't help answering.

"Like how much?"

"A few grams."

Andre shrugged. *“Sure. I could design one that could carry more.”*

“Could you make a lot of them?”

“Depends.”

“I’d pay well.”

Andre carefully lowered his drone to the sidewalk, picked it up, and stashed it in his pack. He zipped it shut.

“I’d pay you seven hundred pounds for that one.”

Andre was startled, but didn’t show it. After parts, he’d clear three hundred pounds. He slung his pack over his



shoulder and started walking away. *“You can get one pretty much like this online for a lot less,”* he called back to the man.

“But I like yours. Make me ten. I’ll buy one every week. And if that goes well, more. I’ll pay you right now for this one.”

With a little more money he could do so much for his family and himself, thought Andre. He turned to face the man.

“It’s a deal,” he said.

Six months after making the deal with Edward Andre was back in the park in the cool autumnal air. It was a Thursday afternoon and he had come to fly his drones just for fun, something he loved, but rarely got to do. The last couple of months he had been working full time for Edward and had to move

around the city a lot. He was making his drones dip and spin when he saw a young woman approaching.

“Andre is that you?”

It was Toniah. Her voice was deeper, richer, but her accent had not changed, nor the laughter in her every word.

Andre set his drones on hover, shut down his screen, and shoved it into his pack.

“Toniah! It’s been a very long time!”

He dreamed of this moment of seeing Toniah again, but never thought it might really happen.

“It’s been years!” She gave him a quick, one-armed hug.



She carried a large, simple, leather bag. He glimpsed the latest tablet tucked in one side, along with a notebook and several other books. She was tall and slim and wore black leggings, a long white sweater, expensive leather boots and a brightly patterned turban. She looked amazing. Now she was sophisticated rather than cute, and her cheeks had a rich apricot burnish beneath her freckles.

“You look great,” she said.

“Thanks,” he said, a bit embarrassed. He knew he looked sharp. He had to in his business. A lot had happened since he had started to work for Edward. His stepmother had thrown him out of the flat not long ago. She hadn’t approved of Edward and the new company Andre had been keeping. He had moved into his own room in a house Edward owned. Not being able to see his brothers and sister made him very sad.

“I’m making good money, now.” He lifted his chin. *“My drone business, it lets me be independent.”*

Toniah pointed to the large, run-down house across the road from the park that was surrounded by a high chain-link fence. *“Are you living there? I thought I saw you coming down the steps the other day. I work near here now. Andre, that house has a bad reputation.”*

Why was this any of her business? *“I’m moving next month. To a corner flat with a great view.”*

“You’re on your own?” She looked concerned. *“What about your family? Your father, your sister... you must have friends? A girlfriend?”*

He shook his head. *“My business takes all my time. When I have enough money saved, then I can think about having my own family. But that will be years. I teach, Toniah,”* he said, suddenly desperate to look good in her eyes. *“I teach kids how to fix drones in the community center, on Saturday mornings.”* It was true. He loved it. But it was not how he earned his money, and he knew that she knew it.

She got out a card and handed it to him. On one side was a lovely design in blue and gold. It must spell her name he thought as he tried to sound the words. *“Toniah... Mmm... arrr...”*

“*Toniah Markley,*” she said quickly. She pulled in her lower lip for a moment and looked at him thoughtfully, head tilted to one side. “*My number is on the back. I’m interning in a social outreach program for kids. We meet every Thursday evening at the library where we brainstorm about community needs. You have skills that we can use. I’m the only tech person there, and I could use a partner; somebody who knows how to do things and can think in new ways.*”

Andre tried to keep his surprise to himself. He was very good at hiding his emotions, but she knew and still cared. She still thought he was the kind of person who might want to help children in need. It was so amazing, and so puzzling, and even a little frightening that someone could see through him like this. No one in his family, no one who saw him on a daily basis, would see him in this light. Not anymore. Nor would she, if she spent any time with him.

As she continued to watch his face closely, she said. “*You know, maybe there is a reason we keep meeting like this. I remember how much you wanted to do something to help other people the last time we met, and I know that you could if you wanted to. I think you’re kind, creative and happy when you’re doing something you love. Do more of that. You’re a really good guy. Believe in yourself, Andre.*”

He wanted to say yes, I’ll go. I’ll cancel all my deals, walk away. I will suddenly be this good guy you think I am, but he couldn’t. He was in too deep working for Edward.

“*I mean it.*” He heard a flash of her old joy and enthusiasm. “*We need your help. You know where we are. Drop in sometime soon. And hey, call me if you need anything. Anything. I mean it.*”

“*Toniah, I...*”

She waited, but he didn't know what to say. I don't have a choice? Was that true?

“Anything,” she said, looking into his eyes with a serious intensity that shook him. Then she turned and walked away.

As he watched her stride across the park her jacket billowing in the wind, he wondered what made her think he would need anything from her. Or that he would even be brave enough to ask, if he did.

It was getting late and time to stop having fun with his drones and to get down to business. With a knot in his chest, he opened his transmitter screen and started up the programme that he created for Edward: the scheduled, untraceable, drug drops using his fleet of drones.

The following Saturday morning Andre headed for Village #7. It was still the same. Andre felt sad as walked into the familiar streets. He walked past the same old pods. They hadn't been done up. They were even more run down than when he had lived there with his dad, before his new family, before his job. The only bright thing was the graffiti amongst the drab building and depressing caravans that were rusting.

Straggly tomatoes and cucumbers grew in dirt that people stole at night from landscaping projects in other parts of the city. There had long been running water and sewers, and the sky was thick with low-slung electric wires, which ran in through windows. Internet servers were bolted onto walls. The old school was gone and a neat, square building stood in its place, but Andre knew that, for whatever reasons, it failed these children as deeply as it had failed him.



When he walked down the roughly paved path, past the pod he and his father had lived in, he glanced through the open door and saw a young woman. Her long, black hair and the red sari she wore glowed in a slant of sunlight as she scrubbed a table with a brush. She pushed her hair away from her face, dropped onto a chair, put one hand to her mouth, and sobbed. Then she looked up and saw him. He wanted to tell her it would be all right, but how could he? She slammed the door.

One of the kids spotted him, and then they were all around him, jumping up and down.

“Andre! Andre!” Like the Pied Piper in the English fairytale, Andre led them through the maze and out to the scruffy field beyond. They settled beneath an ancient tree that had somehow survived the new paving.

“*What did you bring?*” asked Kamal, a twelve-year-old Sudanese boy that Andre thought was one of the brightest.

“*More practice,*” Andre said, bringing out five drones and transmitters, which they eagerly grabbed. He kept changing tiny technical and stylistic details of his drones so that it wouldn’t be easy for police to trace them to him if they ever found them.

“*And when can I go on my own?*” asked Kamal.

Andre stood up and walked away from the tree, leaving the other boys trying out the drones. Kamal followed. “*I have to know that I can trust you,*”

“*You know that you can,*” said the boy in his strongly accented English, standing tall and proud against the blue field flowers. Andre knew the hardships his family had endured on their way here. Like him,

Kamal was the oldest. “*You know that we need to get out of this place. I can see no other way.*”

Andre was surprised at the anger that suddenly boiled in him.

“*Learn to read,*” said Andre, forcefully. He turned and walked away.

“*No,*” said Kamal, catching up with him. “*I beg of you. There will be time for that later. But now, we will get sick and die here after another winter like the last. We could not afford heat. My mother had pneumonia. I need the money.*”

Andre frowned, and sighed. “*Tomorrow, then. Meet me by the pond in the park. Come alone.*”

On their third training trip, Andre took Kamal to a park several miles away, in another section



of town where they would not be recognized. It was near a university, which was a good place to sell drugs. Students strolled in couples, and lay on blankets, studying.

Andre saw her across the park, Toniah. She was unmistakable, standing beneath the drone he was teaching Kamal to operate. He knew the way she walked, her animated way of talking. He wanted to magnify the view from the drone, to see her face, her eyes, her smile. But she was walking and talking with a guy he didn't recognise and he flew the drone away.

As it moved off he saw her look up at it. Then she stopped while her partner walked on. She scanned the park looking for him. He wondered how she could possibly imagine that the drone was his but she recognised it.

He was far away and would never spot him. There she was, the perfect girl, living a perfect life with



everything laid out for her that he could never have. She was talking to another guy, not him.

He imagined her bright eyes as she told the other guy how they could change the world together. This sudden mix of worry, loss, regret and anger that surged through him, could it be jealousy? It must be, he thought. Was there a time when he could have been that guy? He'd always thought about calling her but now it was too late. Not just because there was someone else, but because of who he had become. A drug dealer.

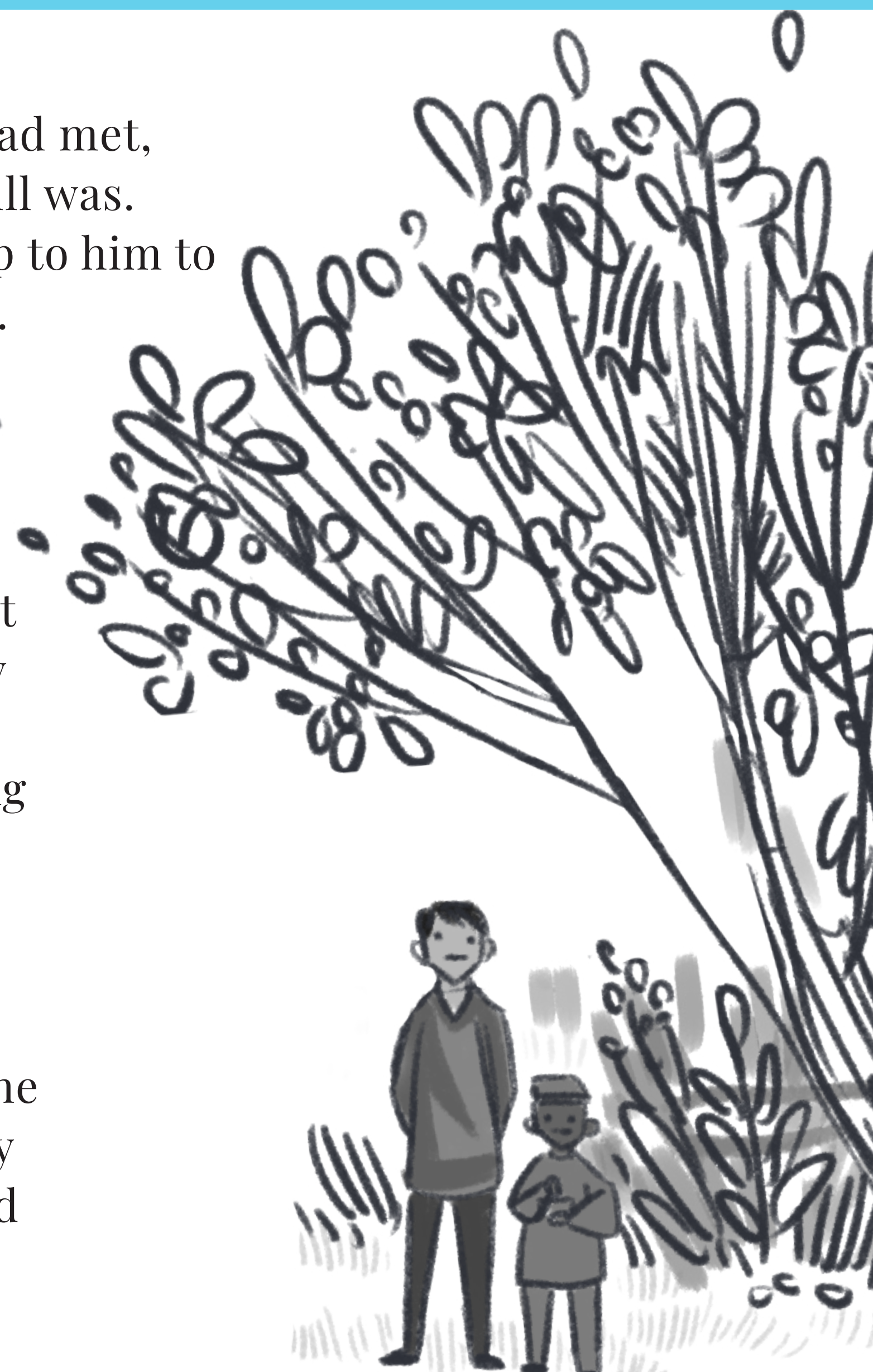
But she knew that, didn't she? She knew so much about him... and yet, she had still cared. She had still given him her card. Charity, he had thought afterwards, but was it really?

She stood still for a moment, hands in her pockets, still staring across the park. She had said there was

a reason they had met, maybe there still was. Maybe it was up to him to prove her right.



He raised his arm to wave but she had already turned away and was striding with that easy long stride, to catch up with her boyfriend. When she did, he watched as they linked arms and walked away.





In Chapter 4, Andre starts using his drones to sell drugs for Edward. He meets Toniah again in the park and she invites him to help her at the youth outreach programme where she works. He wishes his life could be different.

05

CHAPTER



Central London, 2041

Andre knew the man was a detective by the way he walked, even though it was dark in the park. He quickly pressed the override command on his transmitter which would erase all information about the four drones he had just launched. One of them hit a tree and crashed.

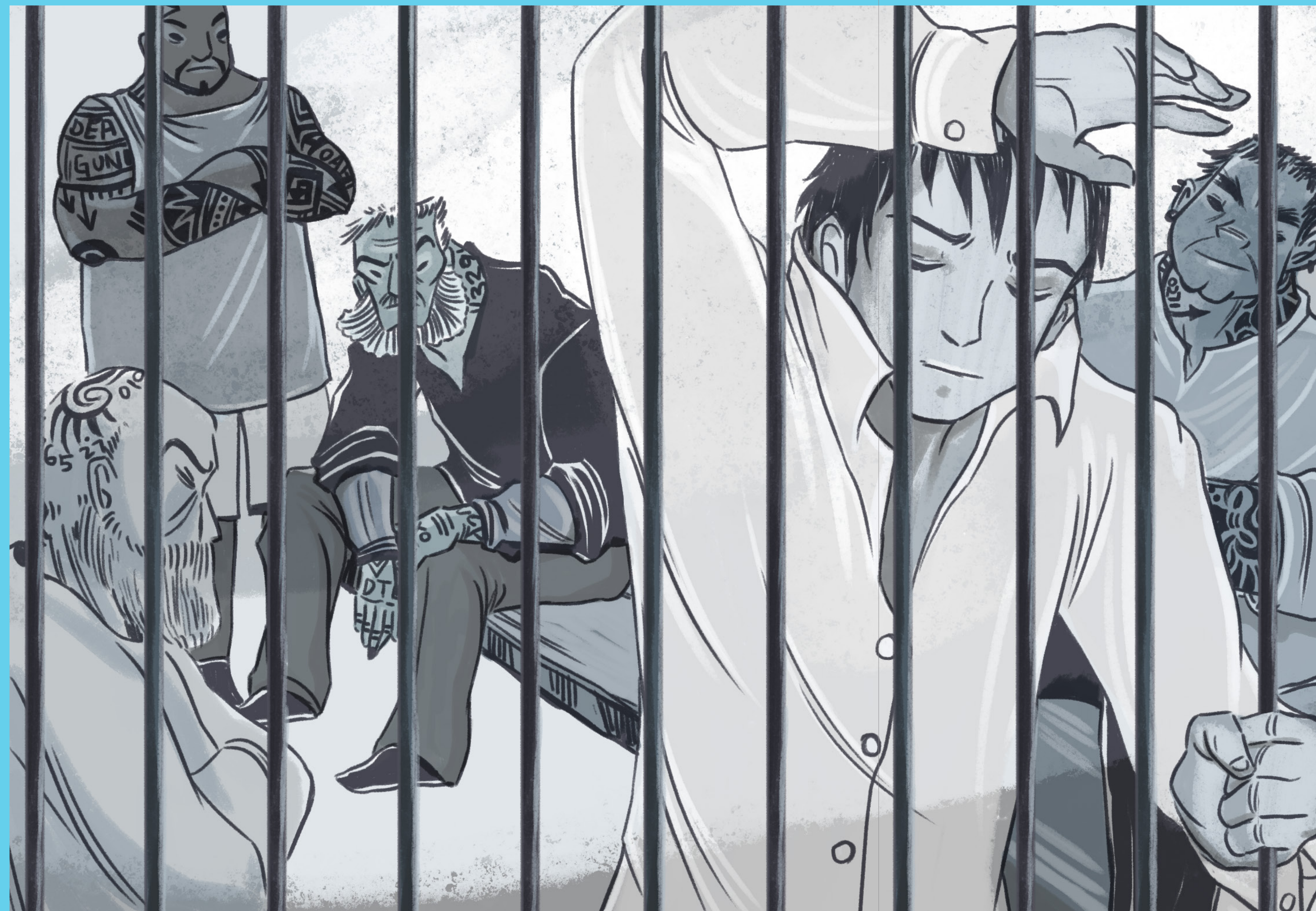
He heard a triumphant shout from the police officers trailing the detective and watched as they held the crashed drone up. His heart sank. The drone still carried a small package of pills. Without even thinking Andre ran towards the officers and lunged for the drone.

One officer tripped him and another kicked him in the side.

“We’ve been looking for you for a long time, kid,” said the detective as the police shoved him into the back of the police car.

Shortly after that he stood in a foul-smelling cell with a lot of hard-looking men who eyed him menacingly. His ribs ached where he had been kicked. He tried to look strong and indifferent like he didn’t care, but inside he felt alone and afraid. He was transported back to that boat so long ago when he was a child, screaming while shouting men tried to pull his mother and brother out of the sea.

Andre turned his back to his cell-mates pretending there was something interesting in the corner as he choked back tears. He clenched his fists in his pockets, took a deep breath, and tried to clear his head.



Each drug drop was carefully calculated so that the number of drugs in each package was just less than the amount that would get him a serious drug-trafficking charge. Edward taught him how to calculate the weights. But that didn't work now. The detective made it clear that they considered Andre to be a known, serious criminal, and that he might be put away for a very long time.

“You! Make your phone call.” The Detective unlocked the cell door and pulled Andre out. Everyone had the right to call their families and arrange a lawyer. But Andre knew his family would not help him.

Toniah’s card had long ago torn and fallen apart but he had memorised the number. It stood out in his mind like a photograph. He could even hear her serious, concerned voice in his head. He had used the strength of that voice, the conviction of it, when he told Kamal, that he would not use him to run drugs. Something about her, all the things she had said, had made him change. It had been just one tiny change, but it had felt good.

He doubted that she would even talk to him, and he doubted that she could help him if she did answer his call.

And yet...

Toniah had picked up the phone and an hour later his bail was paid. Toniah was there. She took him to a corner cafe nearby the police station.

“Tell me everything,” she demanded, *“about the drones and your business.”*

For the first time he felt safe enough to open up and he told her everything. She listened for an hour, prodding him with question after question, her face by turns concerned, horrified, and stern.

“The lawyer who arranged for your release said that because this is your first arrest he may be able to get you off.”

She leaned forward, her elbows on the table between them. *“But Andre, we need to get to the heart of this problem. You’re worth so much more than this. I know it.”*

“I want to change,” he said. “I have to. But I don’t know what else I can do. I don’t know how to make money. I don’t have any skills...”

“You have plenty of marketable skills, Andre. But I know one thing about you. You can’t read.”

He was beyond embarrassment or pride.
“You’re right. I can’t.”

“Do you want to?”

“I do.”



“And you are not taking drugs.”

He shook his head. *“No. I see what they do to people. And I don’t want to be a part of the problem anymore. I just have no idea what to do.”*

“You may get off without a conviction; you may even get off without a record, but you will be on probation, and you won’t have any more chances. You can do a few things for me. First thing, get a job.”

“If I can.”

“You can.”

“I’m helping pay for my little brother’s school. The principal knows it, but my parents don’t.”

“How would your brother feel if he knew he was attending school with drug money? You need to tell your family

everything. Andre, they already know how you live. It won’t be a surprise to them, believe me.”

“How do you know all this?”

Sadness, regret, and deep pain rushed into her eyes which filled with tears. *“My friend’s brother was an addict. He died. Lots of secrets. Lots of pain.”*

“I am sorry,” he said.

“Thank you.” She grabbed some paper napkins, wiped her eyes, and was quiet for a moment. *“I’m very relieved that you’re not an addict, and yet, I don’t know anything about you. Where are you from? You never told me.”*

As the hours passed he told her the whole story. About his grandparents, the roof, the flowers, his mother’s café. About the bombs, the soldiers,

the long journey to safety. He told her about the drownings too, about his mother and little brother not making it.

“Right before I met you,” she said. *“I wish I could have—”* and he wanted to hold her hand and say, ‘no, no, it’s not that bad, everything is alright.’ But he did not take her hand, and he did not say it, because it was that bad.

Later Toniah sent him an app for his phone, one for little kids learning to read in Kurdish. *“Try this,”* she said in her voice message. *“I will see you next week, on Sunday night at eight.”* Then he heard the smile in her voice. *“Same time. Same place.”*

Sunday Andre went to the cafe to wait for Toniah. He wasn’t sure she would make it, but at eight on the dot in she strode, and slung her pack onto the seat of the booth.

*“I’ve been
and I brought*

*“A notebook?
Envelopes?”*

*“My friend is
need to write to*



“Okay,” he said.

“That’s what my little sister told me a long time ago.” Still, all those depressing papers from his childhood flashed through his mind.

“Have you been working on your sounds? Your Kurdish alphabet sounds?”

“Yes,” he said, *“and actually, I enjoy it. It reminds me of home. Some sounds in Kurdish are not in English, and some English sounds are not in Kurdish. I’ve been*

watching videos about teaching reading. I've learned that would have been part of my problem."

"I could never pin your accent down," she said. "It's unusual."

"There are many dialects of Kurdish. We come from many countries. But all of us are Kurds. I liked it that you never asked."

"Maybe I should have."

They were silent for a moment. Then she said, "I'm not saying you have to do this, but it might be a good idea if you practiced your writing, and your sounds and your words in this notebook. And I would really be happy if you could write me a letter every day."

"Really?"

"Yup. My friend said that you need to know someone is listening. I'm listening. Write to me in Kurdish, and I'll figure out how to decode it somehow. How about that? You see, I'm leaving for an internship for my master's in aerospace, and I'll be gone for about six months. I want to keep in touch. You won't let me down, will you?"

"No, I won't," he promised her. He hoped he was strong enough to fulfil his promise.



In Chapter 5, Andre is caught by the police while he is dealing drugs with his drones. Toniah gets him out of jail and encourages him to learn to read and to write letters to her. She is studying for a Masters in Aerospace.

06

CHAPTER



Central London, 2042

It was not easy learning to read. At first Andre felt stupid and clumsy, like the child he had been in his own country where he had left his language and his heart behind. But it also brought back good memories. He was quick at learning Kurdish. He had been able to make his grandparents laugh and exclaim about his cleverness. He remembered long ago, during his first rough spots, that his teacher had told his father that she thought Andre was particularly gifted. At the time Andre's father, had told him, it sounded like praise, but, as the years passed, it became an accusation: he was letting his father down even more by not living up to those expectations.

Tonia iah hêja... He printed slowly in Kurdish... Spas dikim ji bo nivîsandinê ji bo min.

His app told him the sound of each letter. As the app suggested he said them as he wrote them. This helped his brain to remember them, something that should have happened so easily when he was younger when his brain was eager to absorb everything about language and how to communicate by speaking, reading and writing.

The letters looked strange at first but he began to connect them with the sounds; and the sounds with beginnings, ends, and middles of actual words.

His rusty Kurdish returned and he rejoiced in it. Even though he was writing to Toniah, who did not even know Kurdish, he discovered that it was a richer way to say many of the things that he wanted to share with her.

He wrote simple letters about his day. He told her about his new job as a draftsman where he used a computer to draw views of objects, something he loved and excelled in.

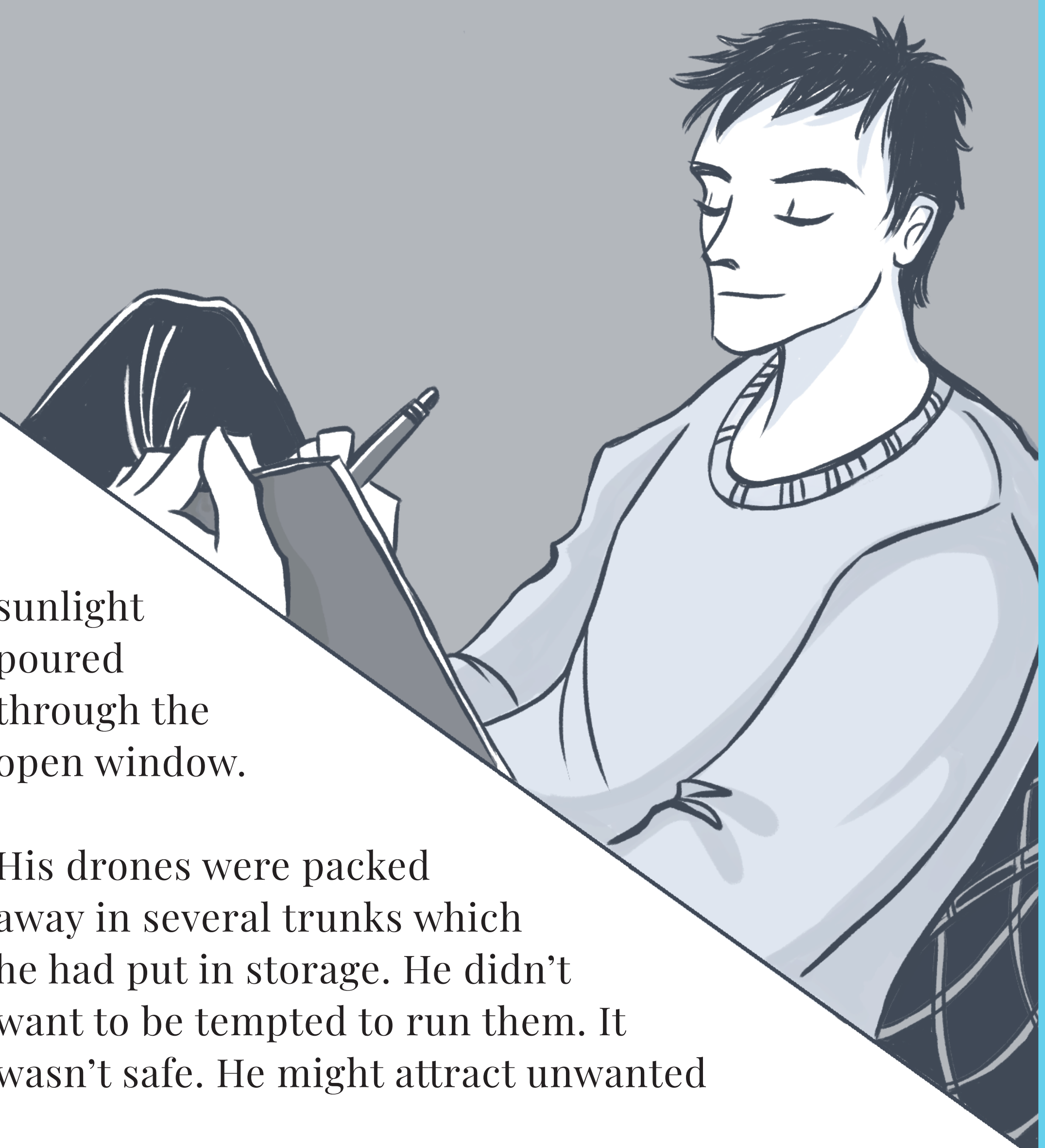
Gradually, the letters grew in difficulty as he struggled to express himself more precisely. He told Toniah, in Kurdish about his projects. He described his new ideas for propelled objects that went beyond drones to helicopters, airplanes and rockets.

He told her how excited he was to learn about the world of physics and electromagnetism. His father started to teach him this long ago before he became too busy.

Andre also began to laboriously decode Toniah's return letters to him. He sounded out the English words. He wrote them down and read them slowly aloud to himself in his tiny room, as summer

sunlight
poured
through the
open window.

His drones were packed away in several trunks which he had put in storage. He didn't want to be tempted to run them. It wasn't safe. He might attract unwanted



interest and get into trouble again with people like Edward. But he was designing a new Hawk for his latest project. It looked like the bird it was named after: strong, fast, and beautiful.

His life was simple: working, reading and running. He used an array of reading apps and read ever-more-complicated books.

Every evening after work he would go for a run in the park. During these runs while his feet pounded a steady rhythm on the pathways in the park, his mind discovered new ways of thinking; he made new connections that seemed to surge through him along with hope and confidence.

I am remaining here to finish my degree, Toniah wrote.

Here are the titles of some books you might really enjoy. If you read them, let me know what you think!

He always did.

Now that I know how things work in the real world, he wrote many months later as snow fell at his window, in the same way that I learned how to make my drones faster, lighter and better controlled, I want to understand other methods of propulsion. I want to figure out the properties of objects at rest and in motion.

His ability to write and to read in English was improving, but it was still slow going.

I want to invent ways to make them work better, and I want to learn how to do that. Reading has opened up a whole new world for me. I know now what people thought long ago or far away. I want to connect with all those ideas. I want to know the history of physics, and how we discovered and built all that we know now. I want to be able to show others what I am thinking, with mathematics, and with words. My mind is dizzy with what I am learning every day in lectures and by

reading.

There are many ways into writing and reading, Toniah. Every day I thank you from the bottom of my heart for being here for me. I hope that you are still enjoying your courses.

Andre

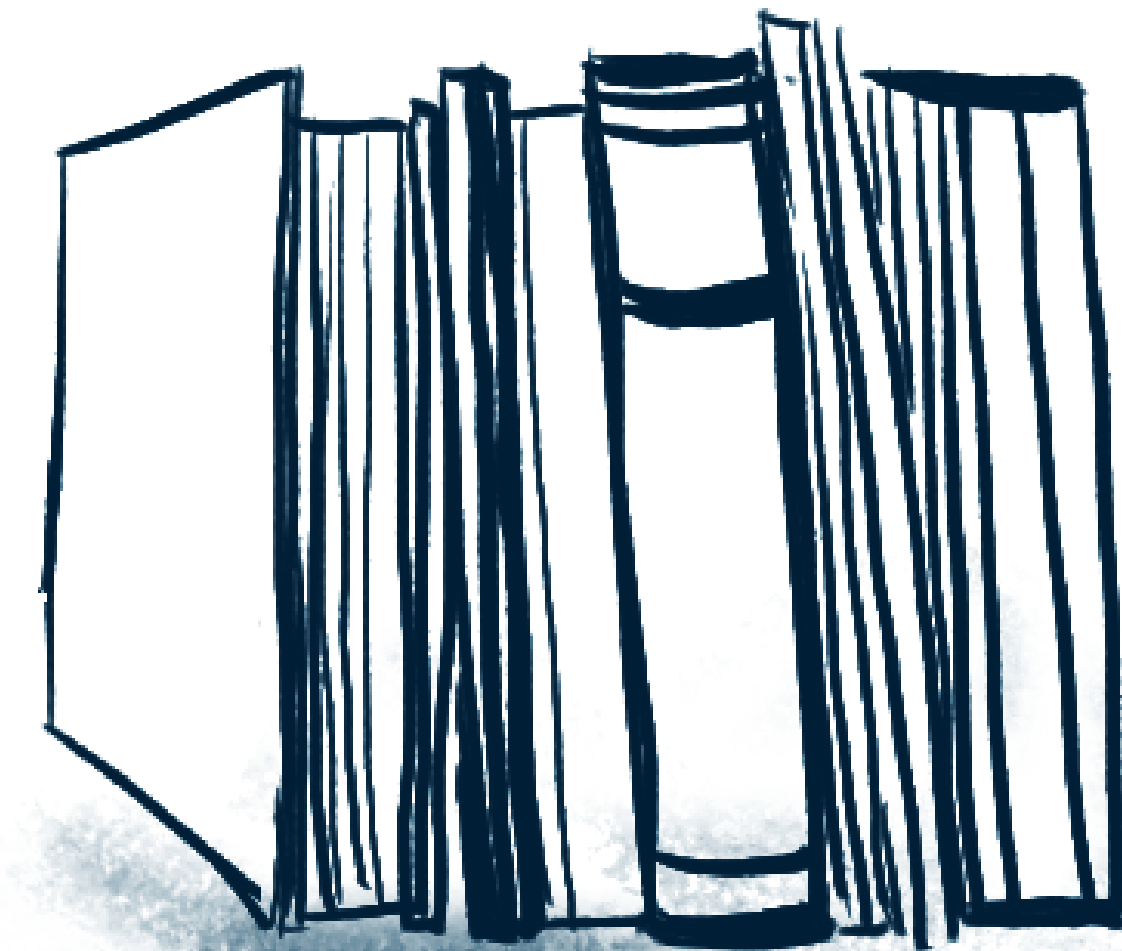
He had fun trying to decode the letters Toniah sent back to him; letters about her excitement and joy in all that she was learning and doing.



In chapter 6, Andre learns to read and write in Kurdish, then in English. He discovers the joy of reading and the new worlds that it opens. He loves getting letters from Toniah and hopes they will meet again soon.

07

CHAPTER



Central London, 2044

Two years later, Andre was taking college courses at night. He still had to struggle, but it was no longer like banging his head against a wall. He loved the struggle; he loved seeing how what he knew from his experience with drones connected with what he was learning, and how both connected with what he might do in the future.

He had a more complex draughting job now which also involved writing reports. He used his computer tools to check his spelling and grammar; but writing and reading, was becoming easier in leaps and bounds.

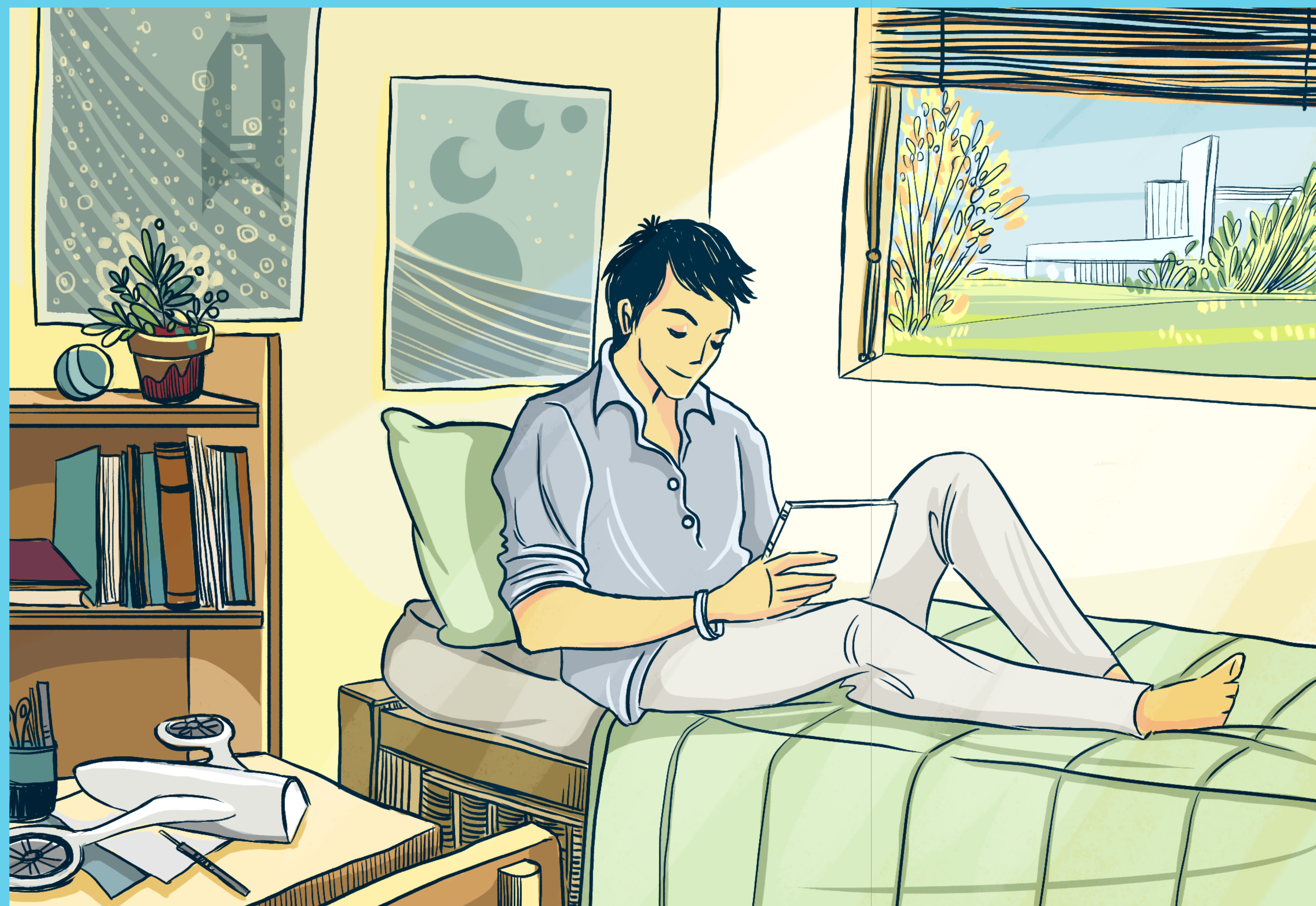
When he returned to his small room one night after work, he eagerly opened Toniah's latest letter.

Dear Andre

I am writing to let you know that Infinity has hired me. I'm starting work next week! I am so excited! Picture me dancing on my toes and flying straight to Mars under my own power!

And I have some news for you. They have some entry level positions that you may be qualified for. I have emailed you the applications, in case you are interested. Read all about the company first! That will really help you with the interview. They have a huge web site, in many languages but I don't think they have anything in Kurdish. Maybe you could help them fix that!"

Andre worked hard on his application, on his essay,



and on his portfolio. He included design plans for his new, majestic Hawks, more advanced and stable than older drones. He wrote how these drones could be made very cheaply and used to transport important supplies to places that had few resources and few roads.

On the day he sent it, as he ran along the river, he impulsively turned toward his

old neighborhood, and ran through the park where he had first met Toniah.

It was kind of strange to think about moving away from here, into the future, whatever that may be. He was leaving behind a lot that was bad.

As he approached the ugly outskirts of Village #7, he thought about his childhood. What could have made it better?

He slowed to a walk as he turned onto what was now called, Primrose Lane, and continued toward his old school. When he turned the corner and saw the new building, it was as if he were six years old again, lugging that horrible story book about those boring English children going to the seashore.

What might have changed his life?

He looked around. Children still played in the puddles, still kicked balls around in the old field, and were still from countries from all over the world and locked out of the future, as he had been.

What were they thinking? What were they feeling? Suddenly, he knew what to do, and he knew how to do it.

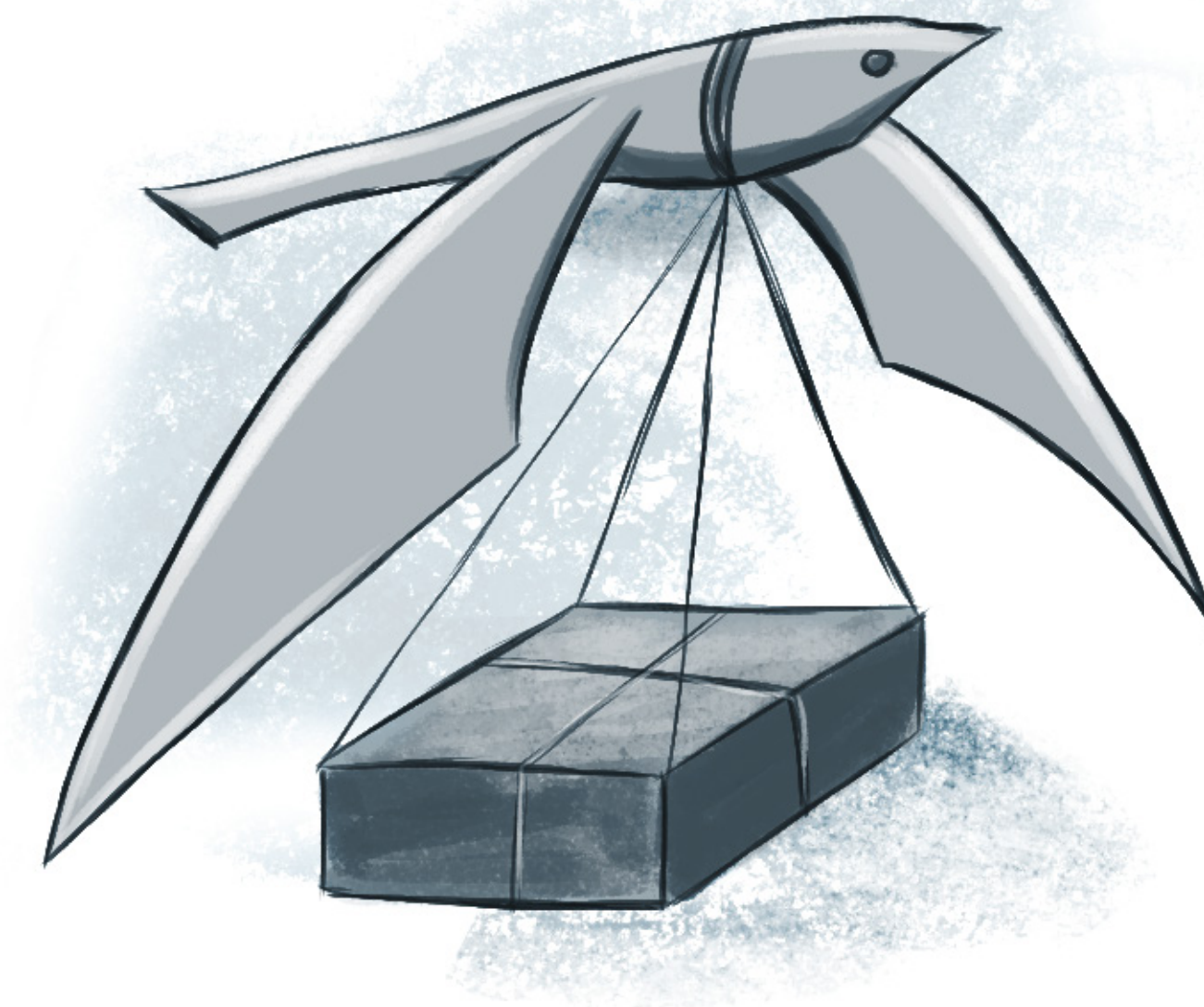




In chapter 7, Andre works and studies part time. He applies to Infinity, the company where Toniah works. He goes back to #Village 7 where he sees that the kids still have no opportunities in life. He realises then, what he and Toniah have to do.

08

CHAPTER



Central London, 2045

The parent-child meeting at the Primrose Lane School had produced many strong stories. There were the stories of refugees from drought-stricken Sudan and Eritrea in North Africa, from war-torn Iraq, Syria, and Turkey in the Middle East, and the conflict-ridden Congo basin in West Africa. There were stories of children wrenched from their homeland and the people they loved, just as he had been all those years ago.

Children of all ages were working on their memory books: stories of fleeing their countries, homes and loved ones being lost, and new friends being made.

Stories of longing for home, an end to war and safety for their families. Stories about how they wanted to contribute to their new country and play their part in its future.

These stories made the dry work of learning sounds and shaping letters meaningful.



The children carried their memory books everywhere with them, and read their words and stories to anyone who would listen.

Andre was one of the many who took time to listen.

Andre had received an acceptance letter from Infinity, which informed him that they wished to fly him to their headquarters to begin training. But he had asked if they could wait a few months, and told them of the project he was working on.

Finally, the books were printed: there were so many stories, told in multiple languages, each by a child who had gone through difficult changes. Each story was unique. Importantly, each book contained some blank pages so that children could write and draw their own stories, and make the books their own. They were in shrink-wrapped packages of a dozen books each.

They were beautiful. He was amazed at how bright, diverse, and individual the children's artwork was. He loved the simplicity and purity of their language; the honest and heartfelt way they told their stories. He knew that the child he had been would have held this book to his heart and worn it to tatters as he used it as a path to writing and reading, a bridge to his new world.

Andre had spent the previous month programming his old drones. The new birdlike drones that he and others had imagined were now replacing them. He felt joy at being able to recycle his old technology for something good. They flew beautifully and it felt right.

At Village #7 he held a special ceremony where he gave out a book to each child. He also gave them packs of books and drones to transport them. Then they began their operation. Yelling with delight, girls and boys ran onto the field to pilot the drones.



The drones carried the books to schools all over London. Andre sent out texts to all the schools so they would be prepared and waiting for the drones. Someone must have spread the news because soon it was all over the web. There were emotional videos of children opening the packages and reading the stories about children just like themselves. They

could start to write their own stories in the space at the back of the books, telling their own journey, and their own deep hopes.

As Andre was watching a video of children in Brighton opening up packages of books on his laptop, a video call came through.



“ANDRE!”

Toniah’s smiling face appeared on his screen. It was so good to hear her enthusiastic voice again *“I saw everything online. Andre, you have done something truly amazing! I am in awe of your vision and commitment.”*

Andre was so excited that he had to stop for a minute to gather his thoughts. *“There are people around the world working out solutions to all kinds of problems: hunger, water shortages, environmental disasters, poverty—big challenges, Toniah! We’ll be able to connect with international experts to develop a larger network to improve literacy...”*

She was quiet for a few minutes as she read.

“It looks as if there are a lot of people doing good things in innovative ways. You said ‘we?’”

“Yes. Toniah, this is my chance to help. I can’t pay back, but I can pay forward. They believe that I can help work out a solution that might change the lives of many, many children who otherwise may not learn to read. Because of you, Toniah, I believe in myself enough to say yes. But I said yes on one condition.”

“Which is?”

“That, if you are interested, you be a part of this mission. Remember that time when you said you wanted to help people? I know from our letters that you’ve already taken big steps in that direction in your university work, and at Infinity. You’re always using what you know to create innovative solutions that connect people and make things better in your community. In your job you’ve taken on even larger projects. You can help make this work. I don’t know how, yet. I don’t know much of what this is all about.”

He realized that he was terribly nervous that she might say no. He took a moment to think about what to say next. *“It’s a big challenge, but one thing I do know is that I want you to be a part of this team.”* He took a deep breath. *“What do you say? You don’t have to decide right now. I’ll have them get in touch with you and...”*

He stopped talking as her face grew serious and thoughtful.

Suddenly he knew that what she was going to say was not in his old English school reader. Just like the children he had helped he had begun to write his own story. The future and the direction his story would take was wide open. He knew it would be filled with the shared energy of this new community he was just beginning to glimpse. He realised with joy that he would never be too old to learn or to change.

Toniah gave him her direct look, the look she had given him when she had set him on the path he was now on, when she laid down the challenge that had led him to learn how to read.

“It’s kind of what I’ve been looking for all my life, I think. Something big, something meaningful.”

Her huge smile emerged. *“Andre, tell them that you have the start of a very good team.”*

That team began with the two of them. They had come a long way from when they had met as children in the park and Andre had a feeling they had a long way still to go together.

