

Coat

I still have the coat I wore.

I was 10, but it still fits me right.

My coat has many colours.

It's cosy and it's bright.

It offered me protection.

It was comfy and warm at night.

I needed to be a warrior

When my family made our flight

Now I think of my coat as my armour

My armour coat helps me remember

How I felt when I left my grandma

And the blanket of love

That held me so tight.

As me and my family all disappeared from sight.

*

I didn't know where we were going.
Our escape from our country was hasty.

I remember my first English breakfast
I loved it, it all was so tasty!

A kind taxi driver found us a hotel
Cause we didn't know where we would stay
And in less than a week I had started in school,
But in class on my very first day
I didn't know how to say:

Yes.

No.

I need to go to the toilet.

Can I have some help?

Can I play with you?

Please and thank you.

What time do we eat?

When can I go home?

When can we go home, please?

*

Dear Grandma,

Coming here has been
Like stepping from a nice warm bath
Into an ice-cold lake.
It's a bit of a shock.
I feel scared
Like I'm getting in trouble all the time.
I don't know what anyone's saying.

I dream of getting a British passport,
So I can see you again
And not just in my mind
Or in dreams.

I'm putting on Mum's lipstick
To kiss this letter goodbye
Because I can't kiss you.

It will be 7 years of paper-kisses
Until I see you again.
By then I'll be 17.

*

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*

It's a 20 year journey I've been on
From just trying to survive
Not understanding the culture
Trying to keep my dreams alive

It's been hard to outgrow those feelings
Of being afraid and alone
Leaving behind the blanket of love
Coming so far from home

And I was always looking for a clue
Of how I would make my dreams come true.

I'm a Londoner now, it's a magical space
Where we celebrate people from every place!

*

And I still have the coat I wore.
I was 10, but it still fits me right.

My armour coat made me a warrior
When my family made our flight.

By

Daniel, Joseph, Khadidja, Zakiyyah

Plane

I'm in the driving seat now.

I'm looking in the rear view.

I'm looking back at my life.

I'm looking back at myself.

I've travelled so far to get where I am.

My mother carried me when I couldn't walk,

When I was too small, because she was strong.

She carried me onto lorries, onto ferries, into cars.

We didn't travel by plane,

But a plane's why I'm here today.

My father flew planes in a war,

The government put him in jail.

His life was in danger,

And he went away.

*

Now I'm looking back again
At the cold parts of my life.

The jail in Italy with the barking police dogs.
The jail bars tip 90 degrees,
Become the cold bars
We sat on in the lorry,
In the dark and the cold
With no toilet to use
For hours and hours.

Then the bars tip back up
Like I've hit a speed bump,
And I'm clutching the bars in the schoolyard,
Clutching for my mother's hands,
On the other side of the fence,
Crying for her not to leave me,
My first day of school
In England.

'Why have you left me here?'
I was so angry.

*

The bars tip again
And I'm back in the lorry.
The lorry drove onto a ferry,
Going to who knows where.
My mother and me in the dark
Hidden away from the world,
Feeling sick, the bars moving,
Then we stop.

Silence.

A blade of light
Tears open the pure darkness of the lorry.
A knife, maybe scissors.
We hold our breath.
We see a kind face, hear a kind voice.
Very polite, very comforting.
Safety.

*

I was in the back seat then.
I was looking in the rear view.
I was looking at my dad.
I hadn't seen him for years.
I didn't know why he'd left in the first place.

I'm trying to figure out
'Who is this guy?'

He gave me a model plane.
It tells his story and mine.
There were reasons he had to leave us behind,
And flying represents freedom.

Freedom is what we all strive for.
Freedom to do what we want.
Freedom to live as we want.

Freedom to fly.
Freedom to fly in safety.

By
Abdul, Gala, and Maksim.

Bookspace

Living in a claustrophobic space,
A family of five, squashed into one room

Thinking of the things they've had to face,
Trying not to be engulfed by gloom.

The dirty carpet and the dampest ceiling.
The embarrassment and anger they were feeling.

If they had known they'd be stuck there for years
The carpet would have been washed with their tears.

*

Absorbed in the pages of her diary
A girl of ten creates space in her mind.

Remembering the games she played in summer,
Regretting all the joy she left behind,

The fruit she picked from countless trees she climbed.
Her Grandma's eyes were always soft and kind.

Absorbed in the pages of her diary
A girl of ten escapes into her mind

Away from the sound of toilets being flushed,
Of people in the hallways, feeling crushed,

Her younger sisters arguing and cross,
Her parents trying not to show their loss.

*

The journey to the airport was so sad
Though her parents tried to make it sound exciting.

The family had to leave because of dad,
Who wasn't safe from all the political fighting.

Their parents gave the kids a few days' notice.
To make it seem like an adventure was their focus,

But saying goodbye to their grandparents
For maybe the final time

Seemed to the children
Like a crime.

*

Absorbed in the pages of her diary
A girl of ten looks forward in her mind.

A happy school with lots of friends, adventures,
And the big new house her family will find.

She wants to be a doctor,
But will that wish be found?

Sometimes she cannot pick
Her heart up off the ground.

Her heart weights her down.

But her mum's a strong role model
And her family is resilient

And with determination
She will make her future brilliant.

Absorbed in the pages of her diary
A girl of ten escapes into her mind,

With sorrow for the life she left behind,
Yearning for the life she hopes to find.

By
Ayah, Maryam, Remin, Valerie, and Victor

Crowd

1/

The mother welcomes a crowd into her home.

The daughters' husbands come from everywhere.

Seven siblings tied to places unknown,

As everyone is welcome in the mother's care.

From England, Morocco, Somalia, Jamaica,

And still there's love and welcome left to spare.

The youngest daughter travels to Australia,

To Thailand, all of Europe, and Sri Lanka.

Her home is in two places, England and Somalia,

And she sees the world as a bright adventure.

*

2/

Twenty years earlier

The mum is an outsider,

Tired, outnumbered and alone.

Queueing at the post office,

People push rudely in front of her.

They don't have any patience

When she tries to speak English.

They don't listen.

She can't bear it.

Her husband is gone,

Her children are noisy and many.

People stare at her headscarf.

The crowd of people giving her dirty looks,

Like she's an alien,

Delivered by a UFO from Mars,

When she's human.

Just human,

Just like them.

*

3/

At that time the youngest girl is seven.

She goes to school with crowds of other children,

And a few, like her, go to Salusbury World.

But where is Somalia?

Children ask her in the playground.

Nobody knows.

She tells them

'Do you know East Africa?

Do you know Kenya? Ethiopia?

London is my *second* home!

Somalia is where I come from!'

But nobody knows and nobody has seen

The war, or where her family has been.

*

4/

Going back even further

To seven years earlier

To a carrier plane full of people on the floor

Piling on top of each other, fleeing the ongoing war.

No windows, no heating,

Children screaming and crying,

Nothing to drink but their own tears,

Terrified of flying.

The mother and all her children

Leaving behind trails of love,

Houses, possessions, family,

Fleeing from the guns,

Desperate to find a future

And with nothing yet to see,

And in amongst the crowd,

A six months old baby.

Me.

By Jackson, Jonah, Selmah, and Tomas

The Point

What's the point of all the suffering, what's the point of coming here?
My parents gave up everything and never showed a tear.

If they gave way to their feelings then their tears would be torrential,
So I'll never have a dead-end job, I'll realise my potential.

I'm grateful for their sacrifice, they are so influential.

*

We were lucky, we left early, before the war blew up
My parents didn't want a warzone as the place their children grew up.

Our journey was straightforward but for others who came later,
They walked barefoot over mountains, dodging bullets and bomb craters.

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It's not leaving that's the hardship, it's the never going back,

My parents gave up their careers to carry us onto a track

That brought us here forever while the others stayed behind

Our uncles, aunts and grandparents, held only in our minds.

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Then I came to Salusbury World, there were so many just like me,

Same name, same home, from Kosovo, we grew together tightly.

We bonded to each other like we were knotted to a tree,

And all our different journeys led to one place:

A place to be free.

By Holly, Huda, Mwahib, Rosie

Birthday

Imagine you're the only adult
With as many kids in the home
As the jobs you have to do for them.

Imagine every day
It starts this way –

Buying and cooking food
Whether or not you're in the mood,
Cleaning the house from bottom to top,
Never a day you get to stop,

Buying and washing everyone's clothes,
You keep on receiving loads and loads,
Trying to stop the children fighting
Even though they find it exciting.

Every day is an endless chore.
Is this the cost of escaping a war?
Where people are dying more and more.

Imagine you're the only adult,
With so many kids, so far from home,

Imagine you are that mum.

*

What would you want for your birthday,
If you could have anything in the world?

Would you want

An Apple watch?

Every book in the world?

A horse of your own?

A Tesla car? A Jaguar?

Playing trampoline dodgeball?

Playing on your own private beach?

Would you want the whole earth on your plate

That you could sit down to eat?

Would you want an ideal, perfect life?

Would you want world peace?

What would you want for your birthday,

If you were about to be four,

And you had just escaped from a war?

*

Closing the front door on the war,
Mum's not the only adult any more
And the youngest daughter's turning four.

Maybe she wore a party dress,
Maybe she was looking her best,
Maybe her dress could twirl and whirl,
But that's not why she's a joyous girl.

After so many atrocious times,
The family escaping ferocious crimes,
Have all arrived in London to stay,
To celebrate this longed for day.

Wouldn't you want that for your birthday?

By

Anisa, Enrico, Genevieve, Tyler