

In a trap

The voices outside the lorry were loud and angry. Maria began to cry. 'I'm frightened, Max,' she said.

Maxim put his arm around his younger sister and said, 'It will be okay.'

'What are they saying out there?' someone asked him.

Maxim could speak four languages, and French was one of them. 'There's trouble,' he said. 'Be quiet so I can listen.'

The Moldovan men, women and children lay quietly in the dark. They were under a false floor in the back of the lorry. Maxim put his ear against the side of the lorry and listened carefully.

'Well?' a voice asked out of the dark.

'We're turning back. We're going to have to try another way,' said Maxim. 'Another lorry off the Dover ferry was stopped. They found a group of people hidden behind bags of potatoes. The police are checking every lorry.'

'Ah,' said a different voice. 'So we are on the road to nowhere.'

Maxim thought, *Most of the Chinese people in the other lorry are dead. They were truly on the road to nowhere.* But he didn't tell the others. They were all in a trap and there was no way out.

Nick Bennett and his parents sat in the kitchen and ate their dinner silently. No one spoke at dinnertime except to say 'Pass the butter,' and 'Thank you'. Mr Bennett, Nick's father, liked to listen to the radio news.

Nick's dog Zip lay at his feet. The dog's tail beat against the leg of Nick's chair. Zip was hoping Nick would drop a piece of meat onto the floor for him.

The newsreader on the radio began another story: *This morning sixteen people were arrested by police in London and Kent. The police believe that they are people smugglers and have smuggled thousands of people into the United Kingdom over the last two years. The illegal immigrants were brought into the country by air, by sea and in vans and lorries. The people smugglers were arrested after thirty-six Chinese were found dead in a lorry on the Dover ferry yesterday.*

'I hope those people smugglers get locked up for a long time,' said Mr Bennett.

The newsreader continued with his stories. Mrs Bennett stood up from the table and went to make some tea.

Nick dropped some meat to Zip while his father wasn't looking. The dog ate hungrily. Nick began to think of other things. There was a note in his school bag. Later in the year his class was going on a trip to France for two weeks. Nick really wanted to go, but he knew what his parents would say. Neither of his parents had ever been abroad. When they talked about travel, Mr Bennett always said, 'There's never enough money for things we need on the farm.' Mrs Bennett always said, 'Home's best,' but Nick sometimes saw her watching travel programmes on television.

The newsreader began another story: *Dairy farmers in the area continue to have problems. One farmer in Ashford, Clive Dunn, is selling all ninety-five of his cows.*

The voice of the farmer came over the radio: *There's no money in dairy farming now. We farmers don't get enough money for our milk.*

'That's one less dairy farmer,' said Mr Bennett. 'But not me. And not you, lad.'

Nick looked down at the table. 'Yes, Dad.'

Mrs Bennett came in with tea and asked, 'Have you got any homework, Nick?'

'I've got lots,' said Nick. He took his bag and opened it. 'And

I've got a note for you.' He gave the note to his mother.

She read it and then said, 'Oh dear.'

Mr Bennett took the note and read it. He said, 'You don't want to go on that.'

Nick said, 'I really want to, Dad.'

'The Bennetts don't go abroad,' Mr Bennett began.

'You don't, Dad. But I do. I'm learning French. I'd like to go and talk to real French people.'

'Farmers don't need to speak French,' said Mr Bennett. 'Anyway, there's no money for holidays.'

'But, Dad,' said Nick, 'I could get a job after school and save the money myself. My friend Jake says his dad will give me a job in his garage.'

Mr Bennett said, 'Who'll do the work around here when you're at the garage?'

Mrs Bennett said, 'Go and do your homework, Nick.'

Nick threw his bag down onto the floor and said, 'If I have to be a farmer, I don't need to do homework.' He put on his coat then marched to the back door. 'Come on, Zip,' he said.

Zip stood up on his three legs and limped after Nick.

Mr Bennett called, 'Can you check old Flo in the top field? She's not looking too well.'

'Check her yourself,' said Nick quietly, but he stopped, pulled on his Wellington boots and picked up a torch. Nick didn't want to be a farmer but he loved the animals on Greenfields Farm.

He and Zip walked away from the house, past the barns and across the fields. It had rained all day and the ground was soft under his boots. Nick found Flo. She was lying with some other cows in the top field. He rubbed the old cow's head and ran his hands over her back. 'It's cold out here,' he said. 'A nice warm barn will be better for you tonight.' He helped Flo onto her feet and then walked her slowly down to the barn. The cow lay down on the hay inside.



‘Isn’t that better?’ said Nick as the cow turned her sad eyes to him.

Nick wasn’t ready to go back to the house. ‘Let’s go down to the beach,’ he said to Zip.

He pushed his hands into his pockets and marched along quickly. Zip limped along beside him.

Nick had found Zip when the dog was small. The dog’s leg was caught in a rabbit trap. Nick saved Zip’s life but the leg couldn’t be saved.

The Bennetts’ land went all the way down to the sea. Nick and Zip crossed the fields until they came to the edge of the cliffs. Then Nick turned the torch on and they followed a narrow path towards the beach below.

They were nearly at the beach when Nick saw headlights in the distance. There was a lane that ran between Greenfields Farm and the woods next to it. In summer the Bennetts’ neighbours used the beach for swimming and picnics, but it was unusual to see anyone drive down the lane at this time of night in early spring.

Nick watched the headlights come closer. A car drove slowly down the lane and onto the beach. It was pulling a boat on a trailer behind it. The car reversed until the trailer was in the water. The driver got out and went around to the back of the car. After a few minutes the boat slid into the water. The driver got back into the car and drove it up, away from the water, then stopped and got out.

Nick walked onto the beach. As he got closer the man noticed him and called, ‘Who’s there?’

Nick recognised the man in the moonlight. He turned off his torch and said, ‘Hello, Mr Mason.’

‘Oh, it’s you, Nick,’ said the man. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I’m just taking Zip for a walk before I do my homework,’ said Nick.