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Opening extract from

A Strange Land

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To Malala Yousafzai, an inspirational woman

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Chapter 1
Ropes

There are these people. They've got something on me.

I'm Jack Keenan. In turn, I've got something on one of the refugee boys.

He's called Hassan. Hassan is new, so he doesn't have anything on anybody. He's just trying to learn the ropes. He wants to fit in, but it isn't that easy. Not at my school. That's

the way it is with new kids. They're outside the loop. Unprotected.

That's what makes Hassan the weakest link. He's the one that can be broken. He's the one they've ordered me to break.

Chapter 2
Inner Circle

I seem to have started in the middle of my story so maybe it's best to jump back to the start.

I guess I better explain about the people who have got something on me. The people who are blackmailing me. They're called the Blokes. The Blokes are maybe half a dozen kids, ten at most, who pull the strings at my school. You wouldn't think so few kids could be so powerful, but the Blokes are.



The Blokes say what's OK and what's not. Who gets dragged into the inner circles, who is kept out, who is to be broken. And they've decided that Hassan has to be broken.

So be it.

The main thing about the Blokes is that they are English. Add that to the fact that they are white and, well, blokes, and you pretty much have it. Girls are for show only. Totty. As for the black kids and the refugees, they'll never be part of the inner circle. The inner circle is for whites only.

For the Blokes, English equals white.

'There ain't no black in the Union Jack. Or brown.'

That's what the Blokes think. The bottom line is, the Blokes like to think they are as English as fish and chips, St George T-shirts and a thump in the kidneys.