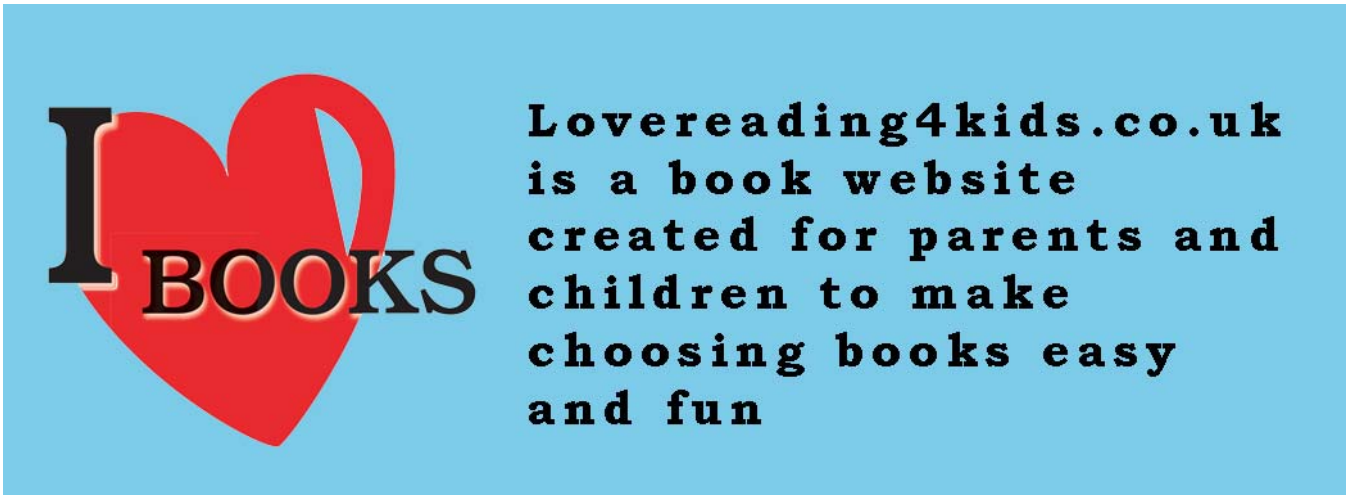


Opening extract from

Alpha

Written by

Bessora Barroux

Translated by

Sarah Ardizzone

Published by

Amnesty International

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BESSORA BARROUX

ALPHA

ABIDJAN TO GARE DU NORD



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
SARAH ARDIZZONE

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Here is a book we should all be reading, young and old, of whatever country and continent, of whatever religion, or of no religion, of whatever political persuasion or none. Here is a writer and illustrator of formidable talent, who tell a searing tale of our time, the tale of the migrant, the refugee, the unwanted of this world.

It is not a comfortable read for us in the comparative comfort of Western society. No punches are pulled. It is a stark and seemingly hopeless story. But even in this desperate tale the human spirit shines through. There is the fierce determination of the refugee, the asylum seeker, to escape, to endure, never to give up.

Read it and weep. We weep because we know how fortunate we are, because we do so little to reach out and help those who need us most. So often we pass by on the other side. So often we look away. Once you read this deeply troubling book, passing by, looking away, is no longer an option.

MICHAEL MORPURGO



I imagine Europe is beautiful, but very cold too. There isn't dust like there is in Africa. The roads are in good condition. I'm sure it's cleaner than where I come from. I think Europe is a good place to live.



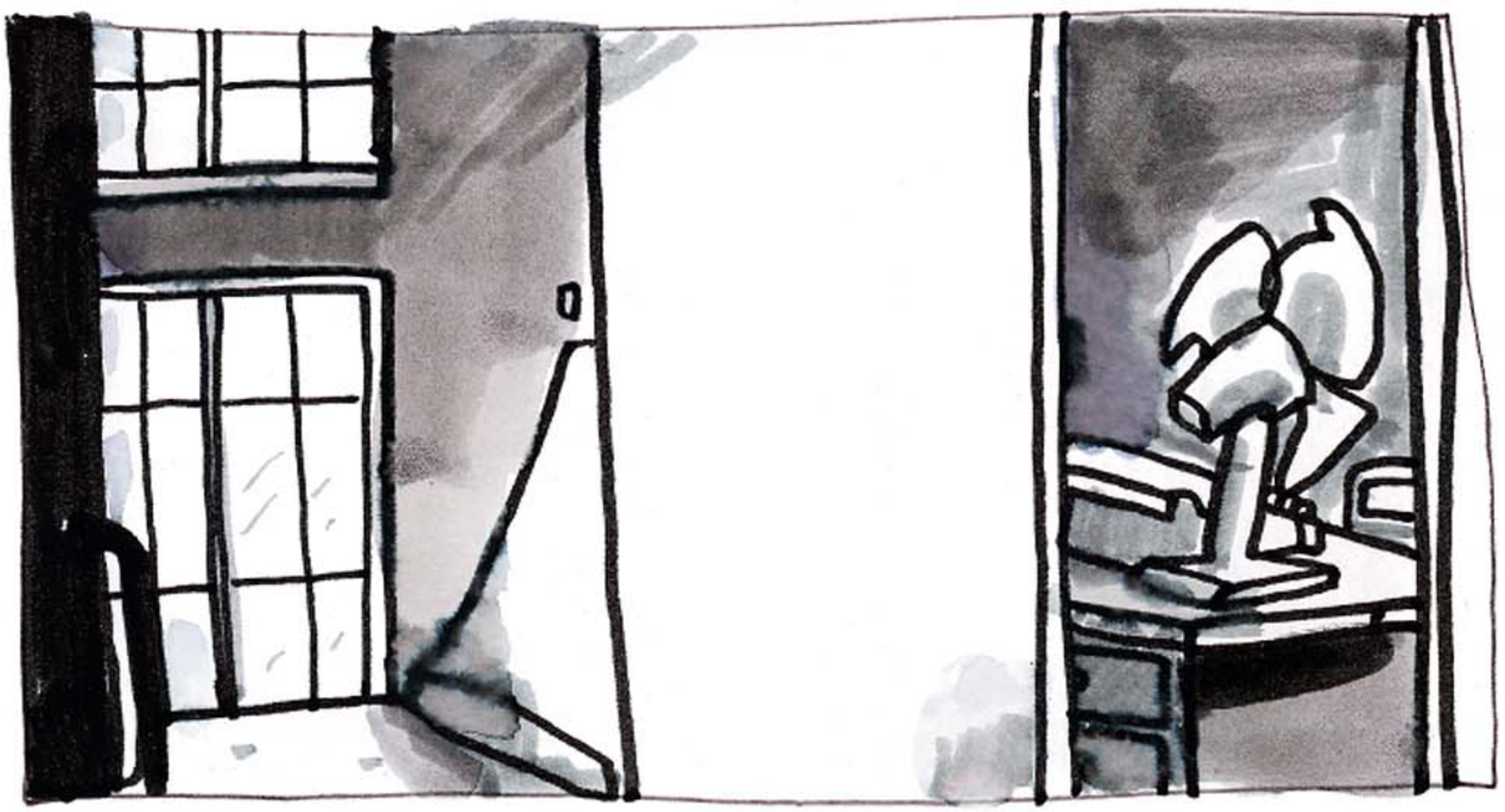
My sister-in-law has a hair salon in Paris, near the Gare du Nord. That's where they are, I suppose. But they never call me. A phone call from Paris to Abidjan is expensive. And I can't call them. I've run out of credit.



My name is Alpha and I'm a cabinet-maker. My family name is Coulibaly, so it sounds like I might be from Mali. But I'm not from Mali, I'm from Côte d'Ivoire. Marital status – a wife and a child. My wife and son left me behind in Abidjan. They never call me. There's no news.



Patience and Badian set off for Paris. No, they didn't have a visa. I mean, have you ever been to the consulate? The three of us went there to start with.



Application for a short-stay Schengen Visa, which is what someone from Côte d'Ivoire needs to enter France. Purpose of travel – visit to family or friends, tourism. Duration of stay – less than three months. The consulate wanted proof of enrolment at the Commercial Registration Office as validated by the District Court of Abidjan, etc. That's because I'm a tradesman. But we weren't going to France on business – we were going to visit my sister-in-law.



For my wife, they required confirmation of employment, holiday leave, etc. Well. That's impossible. "Furthermore," they said, "furthermore" ... persons working as private domestic staff in Côte d'Ivoire must present a letter from their employer, who undertakes not to make the visa applicant work during their stay in France. Why did they ask this? Does my wife look like a cleaner?