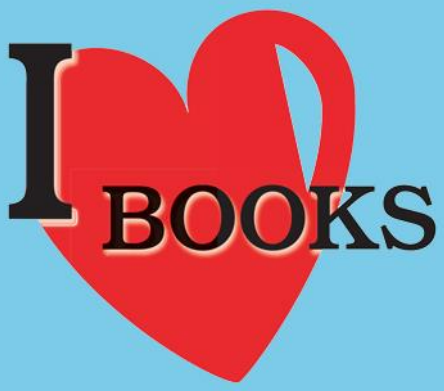


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He glances at his fellow travellers, their faces ghosted by the moon.

They sit in a circle, their knees cramped up to their chins, clutching the remains of their lives in small bags of belongings.

A man and wife sit together, their arms wrapped around their two young children.



Beside them, an old man carrying a small white dog.

And two boys, with the dark shadow of manhood on their faces.

They are all strangers to him, strangers who by their leaving have joined him too. They are bound together, floating across time and space, to the promise of a safe harbour of a different world.

The outboard engine gave up some time ago.
It spluttered its death rattle.

A last cough.
A last breath.
Then silence.

Leaving them without maps,
without oars,
spinning,
spinning,
spinning,

Slowly beneath the stars.



In a small boat.

With a small hope.

In a rising wind.

On a rising sea.

The wind and waves begin to dance, kicking up cold salt-spray. The boy runs his fingers along the goose bumps that rise on his bare arms.

He is real.

He is here.

Here is now.

I am alive, he thinks. He tilts his head back and speaks to the stars. 'My name is Rami and I am still alive.'

Another voice speaks into the night.

'You look cold, Rami.'

The young mother has spoken. She offers her knitted shawl. 'Here, wrap this around you.'

Rami pulls his red scarf tighter around his neck and shakes his head. 'Thank you, but I am warm enough.'

The woman's eyes rest on Rami. 'My name is Nor,' she says, 'and this is my husband, Mustafa.'

Mustafa lifts his head from his hands and manages a weak smile. He has been sick since leaving land.

Nor pushes stray wisps of hair beneath her headscarf. She rests her hand on each child in turn. 'This is my son,

Bashar. He is six. And my daughter, Amani, who is four.'

Bashar's eyes are wide and round. His eyebrows jump as each wave thumps against the boat. Amani is curled beside him, escaped in sleep.

Both children are wrapped in thick coats and blankets. They are the only ones with lifejackets in this boat, which is not a boat. It is a toy, a plaything for beaches and swimming pools. Two layers of plastic and air are all that lie between its passengers and the bottom of the sea. A belt buckle or loose hairpin could tear it apart. A ride on this rubber dinghy is as expensive as a cabin on a cruise ship. A one way ticket, a thousand dollars each.



‘My name is Mohammad,’ says the old man. He strokes the ears of the shivering dog tucked inside his coat. ‘And this is Bini. It is a long time since she was a puppy, and even longer since I was a boy, but we still have each other.’

‘My name is Youssef,’ says the older of the two boys. ‘And this is my brother, Hassan. We have been travelling for many days now.’ He looks across at Rami. ‘We are also still alive.’



The words tumble from the passengers' lips, keen to etch names and places into each other's minds.

Remember me.

Remember my name.