Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

Opening extract from

Rift

Written by

Beverly Birch

Published by

Egmont

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

For my daughters, Kate and Rachel



EGMONT
We bring stories to life

First published 2006
by Egmont UK Limited
239 Kensington High Street, London W8 6SA

Text copyright © 2006 Beverley Birch
Cover illustration copyright © 2006 Hannah Barton

The moral rights of the author and illustrator have been asserted

ISBN 978 1 4052 1589 3
ISBN 1 4052 1589 5

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the CPI Group

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher and copyright owner.



darkness

Ella turned her head, listened. Only the faint tick of her wristwatch in the heavy silence, and the boy's quiet presence. Darkness, thick and hot.

The boy had not moved: she was mistaken. Stiffly, she shifted her legs. Knotted muscles throbbed. She was sweating, yet cold.

How many hours till dawn?

She rolled over. Her eyes, travelling the dark, found the pale square of the newspaper. It lay on the floor beside her camp-bed, next to the backpack and shoes. She couldn't see the headline, but she didn't need to. She knew it by heart.

Front page, main story:

MIRACLE RESCUE OF MISSING BOY

Mystery deepens in 'Chomlaya Vanishings'

Missing British schoolboy, Joe Wilson, 14, has been found alive by young goat-herds at the base of Chomlaya Rocks.

Joe disappeared two days ago from his camp at the southern base of Chomlaya. Two other young British visitors, Matt Fisher and Anna Benham, and a local boy, Silowa

Asumoa, disappeared at the same time. British journalist Charlotte Tanner, 29, also vanished some time that day. It is not known whether the two events are linked.

Children tending goats spotted Joe wandering in a dry river gully which descends from the steep north slope of Chomlaya. District Commissioner James Meshami told us, 'It is many days' travel from the students' camp at the south of the precipitous ridge. We do not know how the boy could have reached the other side of Chomlaya, over such difficult and dangerous terrain.'

Joe was flown by helicopter to the nearest hospital at Nanzakoto township, fifty miles west of the camp.

Mystery deepens

Hopes of clues to the location of the others have collapsed, however, as Joe has no memory of the past few days.

Not a single trace of the other three youngsters or the journalist has been found. Police, game rangers and scores of local people continue to scour the area.

In an effort to widen the search, the government has announced that two more army helicopters will be deployed and a senior detective, Inspector Simo Murothi, is being sent in to help the local team led by DC Meshami.

Pictures, possibilities – terrifying possibilities – swarmed through Ella's mind. She forced her gaze away from the newspaper. She fixed on the sound of the boy's slow breathing: the one thread of hope, this stranger asleep in the bed across the hospital room.

Joe woke. A river of sound surged round him, vast, wild. Yet already it was dying, no more now than the slow, soft ebb of a distant tide . . .

He sat up. His throat was raw. His tongue traced his lips – dry blisters, cracked sores – he wondered at it, longed for water, wondered too at the small dark room cut by a shaft of moonlight through the window, crossing the floor and striping his sheets.

He turned his head. There was a camp-bed against the wall, the shadow of someone on it. He tried to fix its meaning in his mind, failed.

He fell back again and closed his eyes.

Ella heard Joe move. She sat up.

In the sudden wash of moonlight she could see his skin damp with sweat, bruises and scratches on his outflung arm. She eased herself off the camp-bed and went across to him, bent

down, peered into his face. But he was still, seemed to sleep again, and there was nothing for her to do.

A renewed, bleak terror rose – for this boy, rescued, but from what? For her sister, missing. For the others, missing.

For herself.

In sleep, she thought, the boy looks so young, younger than he is, younger than me, and he isn't. She had the urge to touch him, to somehow soothe him as if he was a small child, as she wished someone would soothe her, stroking everything frightening away.

Does he know what's happened? Is he remembering, after all?

She returned to the camp-bed. She lowered herself on to it, carefully, not wanting the creak or the scrape of the metal legs on the concrete floor to wake him.

Joe's eyes snapped open. A shadow had touched his face. He lifted his head: only the rush of clouds across the sky, shrouding the moon, passing . . . moonlight repaints the room, white bands rippled by the fitful pattern of trees.

He felt a coldness now, a darkness nudging from memory, a glimmer of shape and shadow and flame –

The echo swirls from the dark like the stroking wings of an

insect, a boundless, urgent murmuring; he knows only its rhythm, the beat of his own heart, and the vast, soaring stillness beyond . . .