TIME TRAVELLERS

ADVENTURE CALLING

For Rehan
SA

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SUFIYA AHMED

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LITTLE TIGER
LONDON

CHAPTER ONE

I nearly jump out of my skin at the first dong. The sound reaches my ears before my eyes fall on it and the sight is everything I'd imagined it to be. We are finally here in front of the most famous clock in the world.

Dong … dong … dong … dong…

The sound of the clock tower carries over the road, louder than the lorries, black cabs and cars that navigate the square. I glance around, noting the difference between the visitors and the locals. The people who work in this city don't seem to be aware of the clock as they rush through the crowd, in a hurry to get to

their destination. The tourists in turn allow themselves to be brushed past as they stare, mouths half open, at London's Big Ben.

The final dong sounds and then there is silence. I finish my counting. That was ten dongs, which means it's ten o'clock. It has taken our group one hour to get here on the Underground from Leytonstone station.

I think back to how I ended up here. It started with a visit from our local Member of Parliament, Sir Peter Frome. Every year, he asks primary-school children in Year Six to design a Christmas card. This year, eight schools took part and three entries from each were chosen for the shortlist, and announced one assembly.

"Su-ha-na!" I was shocked to hear my name called as one of the chosen designs, along with Mia and Ayaan in my class. All three of us were beckoned to the front of the hall. I'd risen on shaking legs and made my way there in disbelief. I'd never been chosen for anything before.

The smile that Mr Hayes, the head teacher,

had flashed at Mia and Ayaan disappeared when he turned to me. "Well, I must say I'm surprised at your work."

Mr Hayes did not like me. He had taken a dislike to me from my first week at the school when I joined Year Six. When I had questioned why the toilet roll in the pupils' toilets was more paper than tissue, he had looked as if smoke would puff out of his ears. That had been it. I've never been able to reverse his opinion of me, not that I wanted to. I disliked him in return.

I glanced at the card he was holding up to the school. The background was a deep blue representing the sea and nestled in the middle was a grey dove that I'd drawn in pencil.

"Would you like to tell us what your card represents?" Mr Hayes asked.

My heart hammered in my chest and my palms became sweaty. How could I explain my design to the whole school? Would they even understand?

"We're waiting," Mr Hayes barked.

I opened my mouth and then shut it again. I must have looked like a fish.

"Su-ha-na." I hated the way Mr Hayes said my name. He barked it as Su… Ha… Na.

My mum's soft voice pronounced it as Suhannah, like savannah. I still remember that. It's one of my precious memories.

"Su-ha-na!" Mr Hayes's impatience was making me panic.

"A news channel was on, and they kept showing the sea and the people who were trying to cross it in little red boats," I blurted. "I thought the sea looked horrible and freezing cold in real life. But all the people still got in the sea because they wanted to live in peace. I think that is why they were travelling here … to find peace. So I coloured in the sea and drew a dove."

Mr Hayes's eyes were wide when I finished. It was as if he couldn't believe the words that had come out of my mouth. "Well, I … and why did you choose a dove?"

I knew I shouldn't have done it. But I did.

I rolled my eyes and followed with, "Because doves are the birds of peace."

"Su-ha-na!" Mr Hayes snapped. "How many times do I have to remind you that we do not tolerate rude behaviour in this school!"

"You're the teacher," I shot back. "How do you not know that doves are the birds of peace?"

Some of the teachers who were seated along the side of the hall tutted.

"My question was for the benefit of the other children," Mr Hayes snapped.

I looked at the floor. I knew I was in trouble now.

"Go and sit down," Mr Hayes ordered. He was so riled that he hadn't even bothered to ask Mia and Ayaan about their designs.

Nobody spoke about the cards again until the school received a letter from the MP's office.

It was incredible news – Mia had won the competition with her drawing of Sir Peter Frome dressed in a Santa Claus suit next to

a speech bubble saying "Ho ho ho!". It was very different to mine and Ayaan's design. His was of a rocket ship with the words "May The Force Be With You This Christmas" written in bold letters at the top.

Mr Hayes was over the moon. It was the first time a pupil from Golden Heights Academy had won. Copies of Mia's design were printed as the MP's official Christmas card, and she even got to have her name added in the corner as the illustrator.

That wasn't the end though. In February, Sir Peter Frome invited all the shortlisted children to the Houses of Parliament as a treat.

I was excited to go but sad for those who were missing out. When Sir Peter Frome had addressed us at one assembly, he had said Parliament belonged to all of us because it was the place where laws were made.

I still remember his words because I was so shocked when I heard them. He had looked directly at the first row of Year Six and declared,

"You can visit Parliament if you want. It's open to everyone and you don't need to pay. Parliament, and I want you to remember this, belongs to every single one of you because the people that work there work for you."

We had all stared at Sir Peter. It had never occurred to any of us that Parliament belonged to us, and even the teachers seemed surprised. I was very glad to discover this and intended to visit Parliament the first chance I got.

Now here I am, standing outside Westminster station and staring up at Big Ben with the rest of the students. Like me, they look completely in awe of the place.

The children from other schools are strangers and I don't know Mia and Ayaan at all. They are good friends and have never really bothered with me. Mia is tiny and looks like she belongs in Year Four rather than Year Six. Her blond hair is plaited into two pigtails either side of her head. Ayaan is the same height as me and has round glasses and perfectly combed black hair.

Looking at Mia and Ayaan, I'm a bit jealous that they both have a friend who's always by their side. I am friendly with a few girls and boys in our class, but I don't have a best friend yet because I'm so new. I had to leave my best friend behind at my old school.

The coolest thing about Golden Heights Academy is the library. I hang out there at break times and lunch. It's where I feel safe. The librarian is Mrs Malbon and I *love* her. She lets me borrow as many books as I want, and she even shares her Bourbon biscuits with me. I love them too. I think Mrs Malbon and Bourbon biscuits are my two favourite things in the world.

"In line, please!" Mr Hayes barks out. As the only head teacher on this trip, he's made himself the leader. None of the other teachers have objected to his taking charge. They all look a bit scared of him.

"We need to get to those traffic lights," Mr Hayes says in his loud, booming voice.

"Follow me and stay in line."

I try not to roll my eyes because I know I'll be in trouble if he catches me. Still, it's hard work to stop myself from mocking Mr Hayes. Honestly, you'd think we were about to cross a dangerous swamp rather than walk a few metres to the traffic lights.

Reaching the corner, we stand in line, waiting to cross, as the traffic roars past. The lights are slow to change and, as the kerb becomes crowded with more people, I find myself being pushed against Ayaan and Mia. It is at this very moment that a voice from a loudspeaker fills the air.

"One planet! One future!"

My head swivels round.

"One planet! One future!"

"Where's that shouting coming from?" I say aloud, to no one in particular.

Mia answers me. "Over there." She points to a group of older teenagers on the opposite side of the road. They are holding up banners

and shouting and laughing together.

Mesmerised, I take a step closer to the road to get a better look.

"Su-ha-na!"

I freeze at my name.

"Get back in line now!" Mr Hayes barks.

I bite my lip and do as I'm told. Ayaan shifts slightly on his feet to make room for me alongside him.

Mr Hayes is still scowling at me. "What did I say to you about being responsible today?" he shouts. "We are in Central London!"

The other children gawk at him in fear. A passer-by in a smart suit and a name tag around his neck hurries past us. He glances back at Mr Hayes and then gives us all a sympathetic look. I want to laugh but struggle to keep my face straight.

"Green man," Mr Hayes announces. "Walk."

We cross the road and line up against the black gates that protect the Parliament building. There is a clearer view of the teenagers from here.

"*Who* are they?" Mia asks aloud.

"They're from Fridays for Future," Ayaan says.

"Fridays for Future?" Mia repeats.

"Have you heard of Greta Thunberg?" I ask, the image of a girl with long hair flashing into my mind. "She's the young Swedish woman who started Fridays for Future and talks about the world ending soon."

Ayaan frowns. "Well, yeah … sort of. Greta actually campaigns to stop climate change."

"Isn't that the same thing?" I say.

Ayaan shakes his head. "Greta was upset and worried about climate change, and how adults are ruining our planet by burning fuel for cars and aeroplanes, among other things. So she went and sat outside her parliament building in Sweden to protest. Then other teenagers joined her and now it's a worldwide movement."

"You know a lot about it," I say, impressed.

A deep red colour creeps up his neck from

under his shirt collar to cover his whole face. "My older sister is a climate-change activist," he mumbles.

"It must be nice to have a sister," I say, wishing I had one. It can be lonely being an only child.

I turn my attention back to the teenagers across the road. They look like they're having fun. I wish I could join them. Maybe I will in a couple of years, if there's still a planet to protect!

Mr Hayes blows his whistle to get our attention. The teacher standing closest to me visibly winces. I know how she feels. My head teacher is *so* embarrassing.

"Everyone, follow me!" Mr Hayes bellows.

A sudden shiver of excitement runs through me as we march behind him. We are finally about to enter the Houses of Parliament and I cannot wait to see the treasures inside!