They would like to turn and run,
but are frozen in place . . .
A hand is reaching through
the curtain of moonlight.

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For Will

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THE UNINVITED

ROSS MACKENZIE



ANDERSEN PRESS

One

Arrival

The Spark in the Sky

Nobody notices the flicker of magic, not at first.

It appears between two of the standing stones, a tiny spark of blueish light that comes from nothing and floats on the warm summer breeze. The spark moves like the down of a dandelion, in gentle, carefree loops, curling through the air between groups of tourists.

It is July on the Isle of Lewis off the north-west coast of Scotland. The day is fine and warm, and the good weather has brought dozens of visitors to the ancient standing Stones of Calanais, which watch over the rugged landscape like guardians.

Among the tourists is five-year-old Alistair Grey, and his mother and sister.

'Isn't this place just amazing?' Mum says, shaking her head in wonder as she looks around. 'Don't you think it's amazing, kids?'

‘I can’t get a signal,’ says Alistair’s older sister Lizzie. Her mobile is clutched in her hand, raised up into the air in a desperate attempt to connect. ‘Can you get a signal?’

Mum ignores the plight of her eleven-year-old daughter, turns her attention to the information leaflet they received when they arrived at the visitor centre. Her eyes widen. ‘These stones have been here for over five thousand years. Imagine that. They’re even older than Stonehenge!’

‘I bet you can get a signal at Stonehenge,’ says Lizzie, shaking her phone. ‘Oh, wait. Got one!’

‘Hey, listen to this, Ally,’ Mum presses on. She crouches beside Alistair, who has a plastic toy sword tucked into the waistband of his shorts, in case of any unexpected encounters with dragons or sharks. ‘It says here that some people think these stones were once used in magical ceremonies.’

Alistair, who has until this moment been quite unimpressed by the stones, looks at his mum, his eyes narrow in suspicion. ‘Magic? *Real* magic?’

‘That’s what it says here,’ she tells him seriously, pointing to the brochure.

‘Your mum’s quite right, you know,’ says a kindly voice nearby. An elderly couple is approaching, the woman in a flowery summer dress and the man in a bright yellow pair of shorts and matching shirt. ‘This is a magical place.’

‘Legend has it,’ says the man from beneath a bushy grey beard, ‘that these stones were once giants, and they were turned to stone as a punishment for some dastardly deed.’ He winks at Alistair.

Alistair looks up at the nearest stone, which towers over him. He imagines it suddenly coming to life, a rocky giant waking up from a long sleep. Angry. And hungry.

'I hope you don't mind us interrupting,' the old woman says. 'We were going to offer to take your picture, the three of you, if you'd like?'

Mum smiles. 'Would you? That would be lovely, thank you.' She hands over her phone, grabs Alistair and Lizzie, and after a few attempts, the woman manages to take a satisfactory photo.

'Brilliant,' says Mum, beaming at her phone screen. 'Thanks.'

After this, they begin all the usual boring grown-up chat. Where are you from? Isn't the weather nice? What a lovely part of the world this is.

Alistair sighs. When he grows up, he will make sure he never wastes time nattering like that. Or watching the news. Or doing laundry.

It is then, as his attention wanders, that something catches his eye. Between the distracted people, a little glowing spark is floating. *It looks*, Alistair thinks, *like a tiny bit of a firework has run off by itself*. He pulls on Mum's sleeve.

'Mum?'

She is still deep in conversation with the elderly couple. 'Don't interrupt, Ally.'

'But, Mum . . . I think I've found a bit of magic.'

He catches the grown-ups sharing a smile he has seen

before. The sort of smile that means, *isn't it amazing what a kid's imagination can come up with*?

'Can I follow it?'

'Mmm?' Mum says, distracted. 'Oh, as long as you don't go far. Lizzie, keep an eye on your brother.'

Lizzie does not look up from her phone. 'I'm on it,' she says.

Alistair begins to follow the spark as it floats, winding between tourists, amazed that nobody else has noticed. It floats higher, higher still, until it is above even the tallest of the standing stones. Then it floats away towards a long line of stones outside the main circle.

It is quiet out here. Everyone is taking photos and selfies inside the circle, and so Alistair is alone as he watches the blue spark drift downwards, out of the sky. It is so bright that it leaves a tiny trace in the air as it goes, like a sparkler on Guy Fawkes night. When he closes his eyes, Alistair can still see the afterimage of it.

Down it comes, down, down, down, in carefree circles, until it floats between two of the tall stones.

And that is when things begin to get very weird.

In the space between the stones, the mote of light stops, simply stops and hangs, frozen. Alistair stares, unsure what he should do next.

In truth, he knows what he *should* do. He *should* go back to Mum, and the safety of the boring conversation she's having with the old man and woman who took their picture. He *should* walk away from this strange, shining thing.

Should.

But what does he *want* to do?

He is not sure.

He does not think this little light seems like it wants to hurt him. If it was an angry light, he thinks, surely it would be buzzing about like a September wasp.

Alistair moves forward in slow, tentative steps, until he is only a couple of steps away from the spark. It hangs in the air above him, quite high, but not, he thinks, out of reach.

His hand closes around the toy sword tucked into his shorts. As he draws the sword, in his mind he is a brave warrior. He lifts the tip of the plastic blade, touches it to the spark.

Nothing happens.

Alistair frowns. He swipes the sword, and the point passes through the floating light. Again, nothing.

Tucking the sword back into his shorts, Alistair decides that he should take his experiment further.

He raises his left hand a little, then hesitates, bunching his fingers into a fist. Then he bites his bottom lip and continues to reach, his fingers outstretched. He is on tiptoes now, his index finger trembling a little as it moves closer to the spark.

Closer.

Closer.

Closer.

Contact.

The tip of Alistair's finger touches the spark. It is cold as

ice, and when his finger brushes against it, the spark makes a thrumming sound and grows brighter. He pulls his finger away, stares at it. There are no marks, but he can still feel the cold. It dances along his finger, travelling down towards his knuckle before it fades.

Alistair smiles. He has always imagined finding a great treasure, having a secret, something that nobody else knows about. This seems like a good secret.

This time he is not at all scared as he reaches for the spark. He welcomes the cold on his fingertip, like touching a feather made of ice. He wonders, if he closes his hand around the light, might he be able to hold it?

If he can hold it, he can take it with him, put it in a jar and keep it in a hidden place. Under his bed, maybe.

His little hand closes over the light.

With a loud whip-cracking sound, a jolt of ice flashes through him, through his entire body. He gasps, staggers back, and falls onto his backside, dazed, shaking his hand, which tingles with a cold electric sensation.

'Ally, what are you doing on the ground? You'll get grass stains all over the bum of your jeans.'

Alistair looks over his shoulder, sees his older sister wandering across the grass towards him, her eyes flicking between her phone screen and him.

'You don't need to babysit me,' he says. 'Go 'way.'

She shakes her head. 'I wish I could. Mum says I need to watch you.'

'I'm not a baby.'

She rolls her eyes. 'Whatever. Just get up.' Her gaze moves from the phone to Alistair, and then past him. Something in her face changes. Her expression stiffens. Her eyes slowly get wider. 'Ally. Get up. Now. And come here.'

He frowns. Blows a very quiet raspberry. She's always bossing him around. Then he notices the weird look on her face, and the fact that her phone is forgotten in her hand. That never happens.

'Ally, I'm not fooling around. Get up.'

Alistair follows Lizzie's gaze to the spot between the standing stones where his little spark of light had been. He blinks. He feels his mouth drop open.

The blue-white spark has expanded to fill the space between the two stones. It shifts and ripples, a translucent curtain that looks for all the world like it is made of pale moonlight thread. The entire surface is alive with spidery crackles and shimmers.

Alistair picks himself up, backs away until he feels his sister behind him, and then does something he hasn't done for ages, since he was very small. He takes her hand. She doesn't resist, squeezing his little hand tight.

They are far enough from the busy main circle of standing stones to feel quite alone. Both Alistair and his sister would like to turn and run, but they are frozen in place, bewitched by the impossible thing they are watching.

A hand is reaching through the curtain of moonlight.

Through the Curtain

The hand is thin, long-fingered, pale. It floats, disembodied, for a long moment. Then its fingers flex, and the hand reaches further out. A slender forearm appears, covered by silken grey material. Then an upper arm, a shoulder, and, at ground level, a foot, a shin, a knee.

Her face comes next, and a pair of tall ears that reach up to slender points either side of her head. As she steps forward, out of the light, the last part of her to make it through is her long red hair, which floats in the air around her head in staticky ribbons, slowly falling over her shoulders and face and back. A strong scent hangs heavy in the air, like hot metal.

She takes a faltering step forward, another, then drops to her knees, exhausted.

Groups of tourists from the stone circle have noticed now and are gathering near Alistair and Lizzie. Among them is Mum, looking frantically around for her children.

'Ally? Lizzie?'

Her voice breaks the spell that had been keeping Alistair silent. 'Mum! Over here! Look!'

She rushes to her children, is about to scold them for wandering, when she sees the red-headed woman on her knees, and the curtain of light, and she falls silent and grabs Alistair and Lizzie tightly to her.

Across the long grass, an American man and woman wearing tartan tourist hats approach the red-headed woman on the ground, help her up. She talks to them in a language nobody understands, her eyes brimming with tears as she points back towards the shifting light, repeating the same foreign sounds over and over in a shaking voice.

And then, as if she has suddenly learned how to speak, the words begin to change as they leave her lips, the shape of the sounds becoming recognisable . . . 'He . . . heellp usss . . . He-elp us.' She points a slender finger back towards the light.

'S . . . s-s-Scourge. The Scourge. Com-ing. Eating.'

'Look!' someone shouts. 'Look there!'

More people are coming through, ragged, pointed-eared men and women with packs and bags slung over shoulders, children clutching stuffed animals. Every face wears a frightened, haunted expression. They come in a steady stream, dozens of them, then hundreds, from whatever place might lie behind that light.

'Come on,' says Mum, taking Alistair's hand, pulling him and his sister away. 'We're going.'

She drags them back through the circle of stones, running from the light and the strange people who have come from it. Others have the same idea, their initial curiosity turning to fear. Some are on their phones.

'I need the police,' one man is yelling into his mobile as he barges past Alistair.

'No, this is not a prank!' a woman is screeching into her phone. 'All these strange people just appeared out of thin air! You'd better get some officers out here right now. Or the army, or somebody!'

'Mum, you're hurting me!' says Alistair as Mum clutches his arm tightly, steering him towards the visitor centre and the car park. She does not listen, does not loosen her grip. In just a few minutes they are back at the car, fastening seatbelts.

'Mum?' Lizzie's voice cracks. 'What's going on?'

Mum fumbles her keys into the ignition, turns her hand, and the engine putters to life. 'I don't know, Lizzie.'

'But where did those people come from?'

'I have no idea.'

'Where are we going?'

'Home.'

The car moves off. Mum is normally a very careful driver. In fact, her slow driving is something Ally and his sister often tease her about. Today she does not drive slowly. She guns the engine, and the car tears away from the standing stones of Calanais.

'I think it's magic,' says Alistair, stretching around in

his car seat to get a last glimpse towards the stones before they disappear over a hill. He waits for a reply, but none comes. Usually, when he talks about magic, or dragons, or dinosaurs, Mum will smile and say things like, 'You never know, Ally,' even if he knows she doesn't really believe in that sort of stuff. Today, there is no smile. Mum catches his eye in the rear-view mirror, then shares a momentary glance with Lizzie in the front passenger seat.

The look they share says, '*What if he's right?*'

Mum grips the wheel tight, speeds the car up. Through the window, Alistair watches the sparse island landscape, trees and hills and distant mountains, streak past in blurs of green and purple. As they move further from the stones, he thinks again about that little spark, how it moved so beautifully through the air.

How it felt, ice-cold on his finger.

He can almost feel it again.

In fact, he *can* feel it again, a faint pinpoint of cold, as if a snowflake has landed on his flesh.

Alistair takes a sharp breath. A tiny spark of light flickers to life, blueish white, beneath the skin of his index fingertip. It lingers for a moment, moving in a tiny circle, and then it blinks out, and the feeling is gone.

Alistair buries his hand in his lap. He does not say a word. Would not know what to say even if he wanted to. He thinks, it's just my . . . what does Mum call it? My overactive imagination.

But he knows this is not true. The light was real.

Strangely, he does not feel frightened. Quite the opposite in fact. He feels special. He wonders if he might get to have a great secret after all.

On they move, Mum steering their little blue car through the winding country roads, over gentle hills, towards the ferry, and the mainland, and home.

But nothing will ever be the same.

Two

Reaction

Four years after the Arrival

Six O'Clock News

From the UK Evening News Broadcast:

Late autumn in the Scottish Highlands. Sara Osakwe, a television news reporter, stands bundled against the cold in a long winter coat, her scarf and hair whipping around her head. She has positioned herself as close to the gated entrance of a great tent city as the tight security allows. The entrance is heavily fortified, dozens of armed soldiers visible both on the ground and in watchtowers.

Osakwe is stationed between two opposing groups of protestors, separated by dozens of police officers. She stands with a camera operator and sound technician, an earpiece allowing her to hear the voice of the evening news presenter back in the London studio.

Studio Presenter: And now we can go live to Sara Osakwe, outside the Faerae camp in the Highlands. Sara?

Sara Osakwe: Thank you, John. Yes, I'm outside the heavily guarded gates of this enormous tent city, and as you can see, I'm not alone. Hundreds of protestors are here too. Some of them are from human rights groups who say that keeping the people of Faerae in a camp like this is against their rights. Others are vehemently opposed to allowing Faerae folk to stay in the country at all. Now, this camp has been home to over a hundred thousand asylum seekers for four years – ever since they came through from their own land. But that's all set to change, starting tomorrow, when the migrants will be moved to a new, purpose-built camp in the Lake District. It's been a matter of huge contention on both ends of the Faerae divide, and I can bring in a voice from each side now. We have Simon McCracken, spokesperson for Beware Faerae, and Lola Swift of Friends of Faerae. Welcome both.

The camera pans wider to reveal the guests, one standing each side of Sara. Both look nervous to be on the national news.

Sara Osakwe: Simon, let's start with you. Beware Faerae has been very vocal in its opposition to moving the asylum seekers to the new camp. Why?

Simon McCracken, a middle-aged man in a green parka jacket, shakes his head and strokes his straggly greying beard.

Simon McCracken: We're opposed to the move on many levels. Firstly, these people – if you can call them that – have no business being here. We feel that their mere presence puts our country in great danger. And even if you put that aside, quite frankly, we think that in times like these, when money is already tight, the government has better things to spend on. How about sorting out the roads first, eh? Or the hospitals? I mean, how much is this costing?

Sara Osakwe: But haven't the government already given the public assurances that the magical powers of certain asylum seekers will effectively help pay for the new camp by contributing to the economy? That they will be put to work in the camp, creating everything from clothing to, possibly, enchanted armour for our military forces?

Simon McCracken: It's ludicrous. Dangerous enough that we've taken these people in, but to have some of them working for us, playing around with magic that doesn't belong here . . . it's asking for disaster. It has to stop.

Lola Swift, a tall, skinny young woman with dyed red hair, scoffs, unable to stay quiet any longer.

Lola Swift: I'll tell you what's asking for disaster. Keeping a hundred thousand people locked up in a camp not fit for purpose. There's no sewer system in there. It's rife with disease and crime. It's a hellhole, and Friends of Faerae welcomes the move to the new camp as a positive step towards the eventual integration of the Faerae folk into our society.

Sara Osakwe: So, Miss Swift, you are calling for the government to go further? To allow the Faerae migrants to freely join our society?

Lola Swift: Eventually, yes. Look, we know that there are complications . . .

Simon McCracken: Complications? (he points towards the camp) They have magic in there! Mind readers and tricksters! And who the hell knows what else. We don't know what they're capable of. For all we know, they could be plotting to overthrow us right this very minute.

Lola Swift: As I said, Friends of Faerae are aware that it's a complicated situation, but we think that they should have their freedom. There is no reason why

these people should be kept like animals in what is essentially a cage.

Sara Osakwe: I'm afraid we only have a couple of minutes left, so let's concentrate on that talk of security. Miss Swift, the new camp will introduce a custom-made security system, which will require every resident to wear an electronic security tag. What do you make of that?

Lola Swift (shakes her head): I think it's a disgrace.

Sara Osakwe: Care to expand on that, Miss Swift?

Lola Swift: Certainly. We at Friends of Faerae have it on very good authority that these 'security' tags will be capable of giving off high-powered electric shocks. They're nothing more than torture devices to control these poor people by forcing them to live in a constant state of fear.

Sara Osakwe: Now, Miss Swift, that's not the whole story, is it? It's already been revealed that these tags will be used in several ways, from monitoring and security purposes to storing credits that the camp residents will use to buy food and clothing.

Simon McCracken (interrupting): In our opinion, the tags don't go far enough.

Lola Swift: Well, that's a surprise. What would you suggest instead? Fit them all with a ball and chain?

Simon McCracken: We'd suggest sending them back to where they came from. They opened some sort of portal to get here in the first place. We should be forcing them to do it again and reversing the entire process.

Lola Swift: They didn't choose to end up here for goodness' sake! Their land was being eaten up by some sort of dark force. They were desperate. What if you get your way, Mr McCracken, and we try to send them back, and whatever they were running from is just waiting to come through and destroy our world as well?

Simon McCracken: But this has always been our point. By coming through to our world, these people put us at risk from whatever it is they were running from. How do we know they didn't accidentally bring this darkness through with them? What if it's already here, eh?

Sara Osakwe: I'm afraid we're going to have to wrap this up. Final words?

Lola Swift: Friends of Faerae once again calls on the government to treat the people of Faerae with dignity

and respect. We will continue to campaign for the asylum seekers' rights and will push for their integration into our society.

She flashes a peace sign at the camera.

Simon McCracken: And Faerae Beware will continue to stand up for the rights and safety of the people of this country – and the world – by pressing the government to keep a tight leash on these aliens.

Sara Osakwe: Thank you both for your time. Back to you in the studio, John. It seems that this will continue to be a very divisive subject – and one that will develop ever faster in the coming weeks and months, beginning tomorrow, of course, as the mass movement of these refugees to their new camp begins.

Beyond the Fence

Faerae refugee camp, the Highlands, Scotland

'Right, come on, you lot, keep moving!'

The soldier motions with her hand for the long lines to keep filtering forward. It is a cold late October night, and nine-year-old Samm Wolfback watches his breath dance in silver, foggy curls as it leaves his mouth. The air is soup-thick, a choking stew of camp stench, of sewage and rotting garbage and the smells of too many people all living so closely jammed together. High above, a helicopter moves in low circles.

'Stay close to me, Samm,' Mum tells him.

'How much longer?' he asks, trying to get a glimpse through the bodies in front of him. All day he has been watching from their tent as soldiers have called other names. And now that it is finally time for Samm and his mum to escape this wretched tent city, he is frightened something will go wrong at the last minute, that someone will tap Mum on the shoulder and say, *'Not you two. You two stay here.'*

But, as they stand in the shadow of the camp entrance tower, blinding spotlights flashing over them and the air filled with the shouts of soldiers and the roar of engines, that does not happen.

They are only a few places from the front of their line now. Samm watches as the soldiers stationed at the heavy metal gates scan the little metal dog tag around each refugee's neck with a loud BEEP, then shepherd them through. The guards' eyes mostly pass over the Faerae folk, disinterested and cold, like they are herding livestock. Samm has heard there was a time, back in the beginning, when the guards were scared of the Faerae folk. He's heard stories of campmates trying to escape. But that was before the Faerae magic began to fade. Mum says people's powers are weakening because the magic comes from the air in Faerae, and there's none of it here in this world. Now, for most people, magic is a shadow of what it used to be. And the guards aren't scared anymore.

At last, Samm and Mum are first in their line.

There are two soldiers doing the scanning, a man and a woman.

'Stand legs apart, arms out,' the woman soldier orders.

A stab of panic in Samm's chest, but Mum is calm. She does as the guard asks, and Samm copies, spreading his feet and raising his arms up from his sides. The woman soldier pats Mum down, and the man pats Samm, his big hands rough.

Samm swallows as the man feels his coat pocket.

'What's that, pal?'

Samm glances up at Mum, who gives an almost imperceptible nod. The soldier reaches into Samm's pocket and pulls out the objects stowed there. Samm almost calls out but catches himself in the nick of time.

The soldier casts an eye over the first of the objects – a short length of thin, shining, golden rope. He frowns, turns the rope over a couple of times and then shrugs, tossing it back to Samm, who catches it and, quick as he can, stuffs it back into the safety of his pocket.

The soldier is much more interested in the second object. It is about the size and shape of a pocket watch, with fine silver casing.

The soldiers share a look as the object shines in the man's big palm. Samm's heart has become a runaway train in his chest. He feels his eyes prickle, feels tears begin to gather.

'This real silver?' the soldier asks.

'Please,' Mum says, though her voice is quiet. 'It's all he has left of his father.'

The soldier turns the object over, flips the casing open to reveal a smooth black face and a silver needle, like some antique compass, but with no markings. He lets out a low whistle.

'This is nice,' he says, and there is that look between the soldiers again. Samm knows what that look means. 'This is *really* nice.'

'Give it back to him.'

Samm blinks. The words did not come from him, or from Mum, but from a very thin man a couple of places behind them in the line. His face is long and gaunt, his eyes watery blue. The points of his ears are extremely tall. Samm notices a change come over Mum when she sees the man; her body stiffens, and her face tightens.

The male soldier's gaze flashes up from the silver compass.

'What did you say?'

The thin man does not seem scared in the slightest. He repeats, 'Give it back to him.'

Samm's heart skips a beat as the big hand closes around the silver object. The soldier's eyes are alight with a dangerous, angry fire.

'No pointy has ever spoken to me that way,' he says, his voice low. 'And you're not gonna be the first . . .'

He takes a step forward, but the woman soldier grabs him by the arm, pulls him back and, her eyes fixed on the thin Faerae man, speaks something into the soldier's ear.

'That's right,' the thin man says with a smile like a sharp knife. 'I know you know who I am, miss. You tell your friend here who he's talking to.'

The male soldier's face changes, the colour draining out of him. He sets his jaw, straightens his back, as if trying to show that he is not worried. But Samm can tell that he is worried. Maybe even a bit scared.

In a blink, the soldier stuffs the shining object back into Samm's little hand, and he feels a rush of relief and comfort

sweep over him. He tries to turn back towards the thin man, but Mum snatches his arm tight and holds him facing front.

The woman soldier tells Samm and Mum to hold out their wrists, and scans the little tag fastened there. Two loud BEEPs, and then she waves them through.

Mum looks at the ground as she steers, almost drags, Samm through the gate.

One step, two, three, and Samm's feet touch down upon non-camp ground for the first time since he was five years old. He tries to twist, to catch a glimpse of the thin man, but soon they are lost in the crowds.

'Who was that?' he asks.

'Never mind,' Mum says. 'Hurry along now.'

'But he helped us . . .'

'Samm Wolfback, I'm telling you to drop it. Another word and I'll tan your hide in front of all these people. You want that?'

Samm does not want that.

Soldiers shout and direct all about.

'Come on, keep moving, keep moving!'

'This way!'

'That's it, into the back of the truck.'

The truck is huge and dark green, its tyres as tall as Samm. Mum helps him up into the back, where rows of hard benches sit under a canvas cover. The truck is full to bursting with others from the camp, crammed together like cattle.

They find what is surely the last tiny space, squeeze onto the bench, which is hard and cold. Samm is sandwiched

between Mum and an old man who smells strongly of tobacco. The man looks down at Samm, unsmiling, then looks away.

A shout from one of the many soldiers nearby, and the back of the truck slams shut. Then, with a judder, the truck's engine belches into life, making the benches shake and vibrate. Someone outside gives the side of the truck a hard slap, and the vehicle moves off with a roar.

A flutter of excitement takes off and flies loops around Samm's empty belly as he cranes around, trying to catch a glimpse of something, anything, out of one of the tiny round windows in the canvas cover of the truck. But all he can see is darkness. So, he squirms around, kneeling up on the bench, making the big man beside him fuss.

'Samm!' Mum says. 'What are you doing?'

'I just wanna see.'

Among the people in the row of benches behind is a family of four, a mum, a dad and two little girls. When the girls, who look like twins, spot what Samm is doing, they copy, sliding around, kneeling up, looking towards the open back of the truck.

Samm can see the huge main gates of the refugee camp retreating as the lorry picks up speed, the tall watchtowers, the harsh white lights. He can see rows and rows of trucks like this one, their taillights glowing red embers in the night. He can see soldiers, hundreds of them, leading many thousands of refugees into the lorries. He can see the high perimeter fence with its barbed wire gleaming in the camp lights.

And it is all getting smaller. All getting further away as the truck carries them along the road, towards . . .

Towards what?

Another camp, Mum has told him. A nicer one. Well, that wouldn't be hard, would it? Somewhere where there's no raw sewage running down the streets would be a start. Somewhere people can walk alone at night without being frightened for their lives.

The truck makes a slight turn, climbs steeply. When they reach the top of the hill, the view affords Samm a glimpse of the true scale of the camp for the first time, and it steals his breath; it is a vast island of light in a sea of darkness, countless rows of filthy grey tents stretching as far as the eye can see in every direction, lit by huge floodlights. A long runway cuts the camp in two, and beyond it stand the featureless brick blocks of the soldiers' barracks.

Then the truck moves over the crest, and just like that, the camp, and everything Samm has known for four years, is out of sight, replaced by the black void of the night.