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opening extract from

Remembering Green

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published by

Frances Lincoln Publishers Ltd

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Remembering Green

It is the year 2200. This is a story about the future, about change, about global warming and a very, very different world…

… where one girl makes a difference

By Lesley Beake

Stolen!

They came when the moon was dark and there were no stars. The wind blowing from the desert covered the sound of their camels and their muffled calls.

They came through the palm trees beside the river and their eyes glittered above the black cloths wrapped around their faces. They came when we were asleep.

They stole me while my mother slept and my brother – and the new baby lying on the lamb's fleece slept too. Nobody heard them because they were swift and silent and deadly – and they knew what they wanted. They wanted me.

They knew where I was because somebody told them. And that was the worst of all. On the long, terrible journey south to the Drylands that thought stayed in my head. Somebody had betrayed me.

They took Saa too.

Chapter One

‘Right. Next?’

Sharon moved her gum from one side of her mouth to the other. ‘Two brown slices and a red vegetable,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘Two brown slices and a red vegetable!’ Sharon was irritated. I could tell. Sharon often was.

The food server looked annoyed. (I could tell that too. She often did).

‘That’ll be three CCs,’ she said; grumpy.

Sharon tossed her shiny yellow hair over her shoulder and winked at me.

‘Was only two and a half Carbon Credits yesterday,’ she said.

‘*Warmer* than yesterday,’ the food server said nastily. ‘Three species gone since Friday, they reckon. Brown slices cost more.’

Sharon considered. ‘And the red veg?’

The food server smirked. ‘Same thing … really,’ she said. ‘Everything’s getting dearer … DEAR.’ She laughed. ‘It’s all right for you rich kids. Some people haven’t seen a red vegetable … never mind a brown slice … in years … DEAR.’

Sharon fingered through her wallet and found the carbon credits. But her mouth had a sullen twist to it that didn’t augur well for the rest of the afternoon … after what passed for lunch.

*

Sharon is the only person here who is, sort of, friendly to me – sometimes; when it suits her. I have been here for four moons – although it seems like years – but the others look away when they see me, won't catch my eye; won't smile at me. Sharon does … sometimes … even though she is a Tekkie and Tekkies have another kind of life, really. One that has a lot more to do with beeping machinery and small flashing screens and signals to tell them when to recharge their ion extractors or plug in their enhancers. The rest of us just get on with it, here on the island, putting up with the blinding light that reflects endlessly off the pink sea, and the warm wind that blows – and blows and *blows* – in from the southeast most months of the year.

Once, Sharon even let me go with her into one of the chill-chambers – just for a minute – so I could feel what it was like. It was strange in there, I thought, and I wasn't sure if I really liked it. Tekkies lay around on smooth plastic couches and the light was dim and soft. Air that was so cold it was *white*, came chilling out of the vents in the walls, swirling in front of the lights and dampening the sleeping Tekkies who lay there with their eyes closed and smiles on their faces.

I was only in there for such a short time, and yet the hairs on my arms prickled and I shivered. It was too dark … too cool … not real. And although the blast of heat and bright hit me like a stone when we stepped outside again, I welcomed the warmth.

For a moment … for a moment … I remembered another kind of cool. The cool of river water and cold stones, the cool of black shade on hot afternoons, the cool of a palm leaf fanning gently; the cool of a hand on my forehead and the cool of my mother's voice …

*

My mother … will I ever see her again? Sometimes – when I let my mind go to the place where she lives always in my memory, I ache with the dull pain of losing her.

We didn't have all the things the Tekkies have – no music that came out of little silver boxes, no pictures from other times that came from glass tubes, no temperature controls and comfort switches.

Instead, we had the sound of the wind in the palms beside the river. We had the stars overhead at night, clear and silver and cool in the black sky. We had the comfort of a wool blanket when the nights were cool and the chill of river water on warm skin when the days were hot.

We had no walls and fences around us, no guards and patrols with snarl-fanged dogs. But we had each other. And we had a memory of times long gone and the stories of the elders and the sound of laughter – and people smiling in their hearts.

I was born when the earth was old. I was born when there was a scent I will always remember, the scent of rain on dust; the dust of Africa. And that is what my mother called me, Rain.

I think about my mother. She was tall and slim and she wore a green cloth swept up around her hair and a skirt where parrots flew in jungles and the sky was blue.

‘Remember this,’ my mother said. ‘Remember this day.’ I didn’t see what was so special about *that* day. It was just a day like any other. But I listened to what my mother said, because I loved her. I paid special attention to the things that were ordinary that day and just like before.

Our house is in a village where palm trees grow and there is shade to sit under. In the day, when the sun is high, nobody walks about on the hot dust – that is for later when the shadows slip across the ground like spilled ink and the women laugh and shake their skirts and start preparing food for their families.

Then the children play a little and the boys have a socc-ball match in the bare patch behind the kraal where the milk animals live, and we girls collect our pails for water and walk down to the river, balancing them on our heads.

That was the easy part – walking down. We laughed and skipped and sang and told stories. And when we came to the river, we dipped our feet in the coolness and sometimes, if it was not too late, we swam and our laughter splashed across the sun-soaked, brown water like stars.

Walking back was harder, with our pails filled and the weight heavy on our heads, but we stood tall and proud, as our mothers and sisters had taught us and carried the gift back for our families.

Then we would eat, all of us together in the hot, sweet dark that comes quickly in Africa and we would sit, under the stars and grandparents would tell stories to the children and everyone would listen – even the

older boys who pretended not to. Until at last we went to sleep, one by one, and the village was quiet until the next day.

How did my mother know? How did she know that, soon, it would be the end of everything? Everything would change and the most important thing I would still possess would be the memories in my heart.

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