

The **JOURNEY**



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**TELLING
THE
REAL
STORY**



This book was made possible by Telling the Real Story, a community-based platform that documents and shares the stories of Eritrean and Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, and the journeys they take in hopes of making it to Europe. The purpose of this book is to give young people, like you, an accurate picture of the journey and what it's really like. We hope the information you find here will help you make a more informed decision, should you ever consider taking the journey yourself.

www.tellingtherealstory.org

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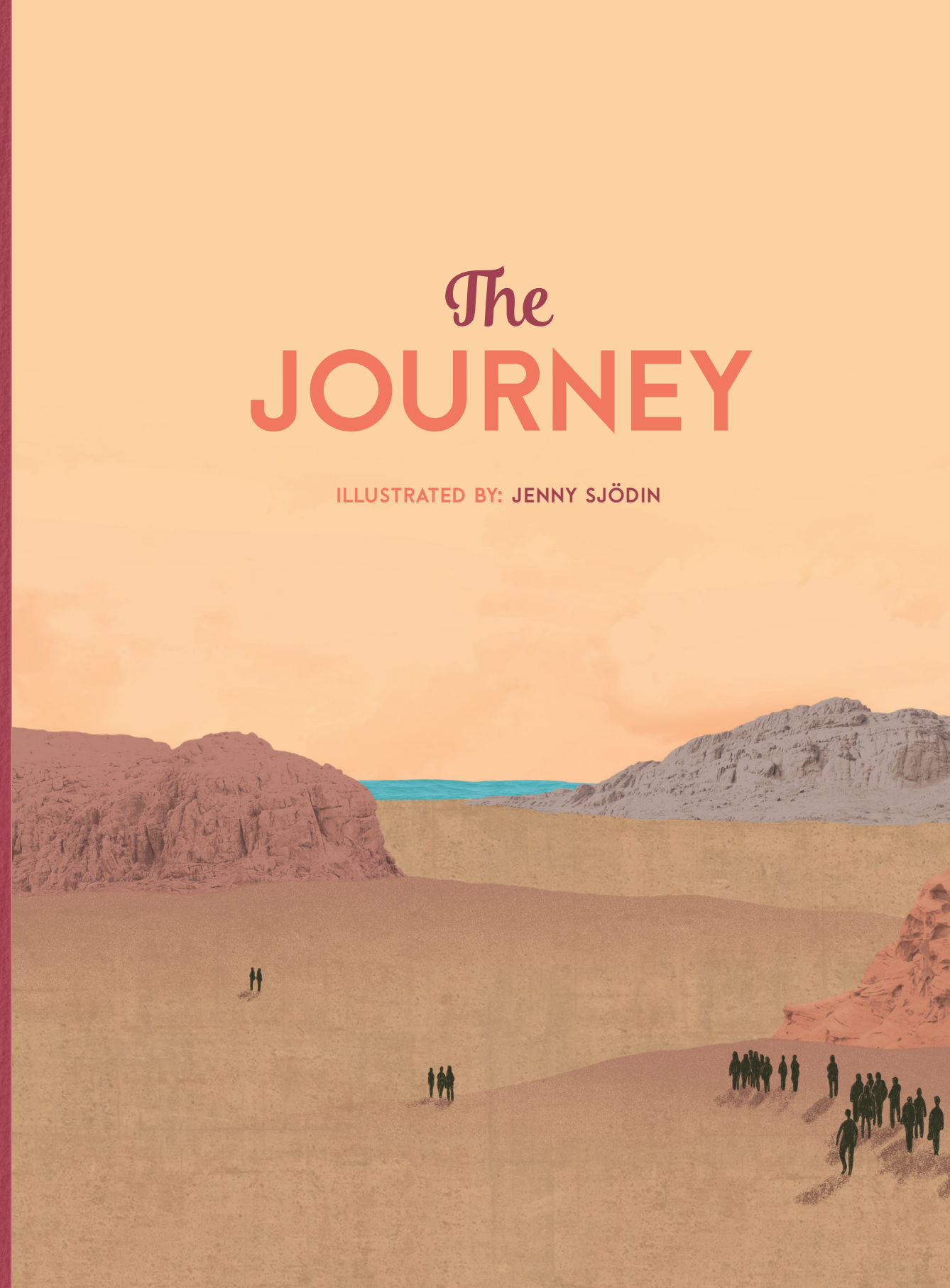
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The JOURNEY

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My name is Lwam. I am 12 years old, and I was born and raised in a beautiful town in Eritrea.



One day, people started to leave town. Suddenly, many of the students at my school were nowhere to be seen. They had left.

Whenever I asked about someone I hadn't seen in a while, I was told they had crossed the border.

All of my friends and cousins were gone. Even my best friend Selam was leaving.





Going to school became difficult. The classrooms were empty.

My parents were worried and tried to persuade me to stay.
But I wouldn't listen. I couldn't imagine staying behind alone.

I decided to leave.



I didn't tell anyone.

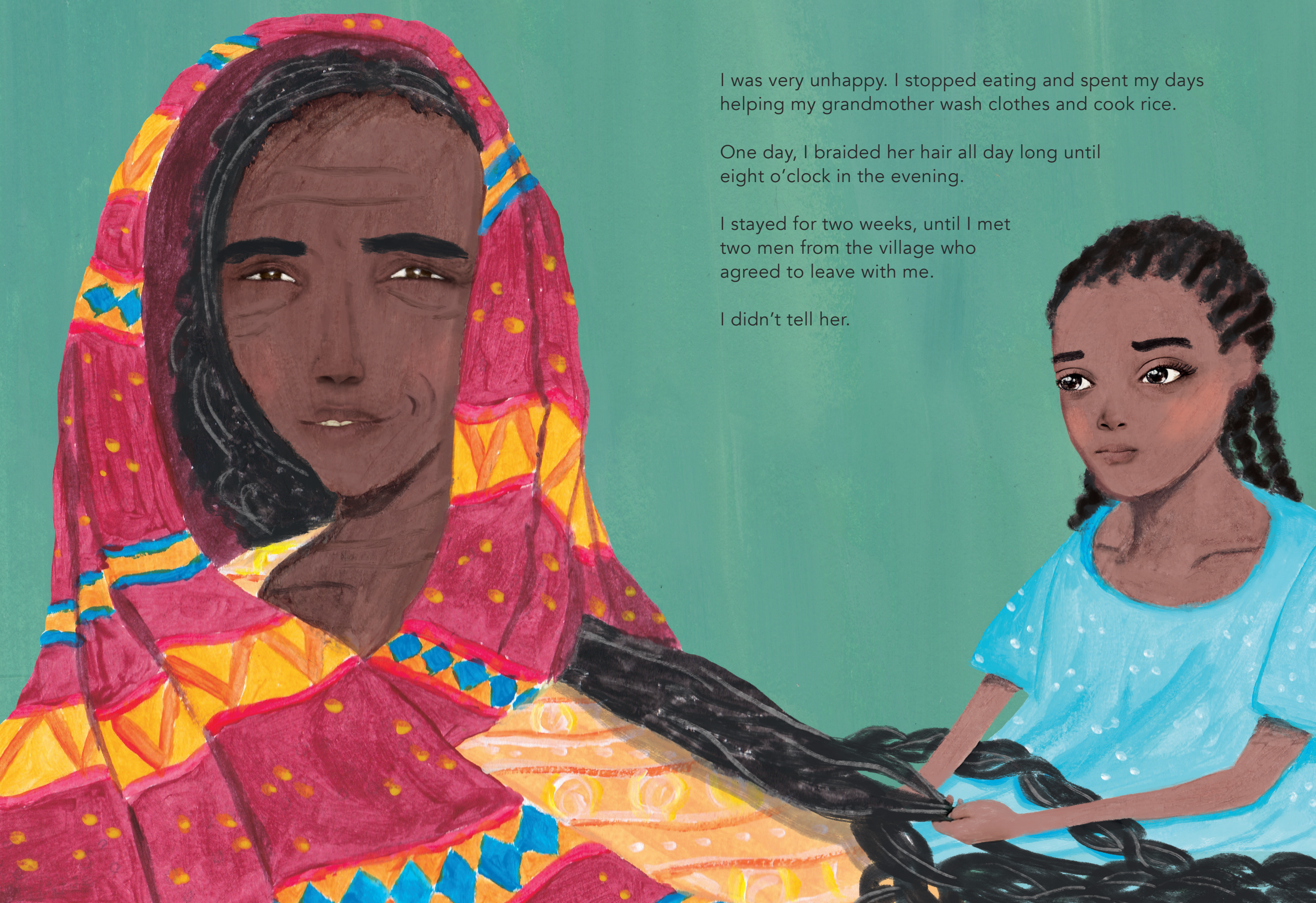
I told my parents I was going to visit my grandmother.
I was well prepared and brought enough clothes and
other things I might need.

My mind was made up.
I was leaving and I wouldn't look back.



I went to my grandmother's village.
But when I arrived, I couldn't find
anyone. It looked like everyone
had left except for the old people
and children.





I was very unhappy. I stopped eating and spent my days helping my grandmother wash clothes and cook rice.

One day, I braided her hair all day long until eight o'clock in the evening.

I stayed for two weeks, until I met two men from the village who agreed to leave with me.

I didn't tell her.

It was late at night when we left. It was pitch dark and the border was very far away. We walked for many hours. Since I hadn't eaten in a while I got really tired.

I'd heard of all sorts of dangers. Like that we might encounter wild animals or suffer from hunger and thirst.



But my mind was made up. I kept on walking.

We walked up and down the mountain until I couldn't walk anymore. We spent the night at the base of the mountain.

In the morning, a group of men found us. They asked us where we were from. We told them, and they said they would take us some place safe. I was scared. I had heard about girls who'd been taken away by bad men. The girls were locked up and the men did bad things to them. Some of the girls were never heard from again.

But we were too exhausted to run away from these men. We had no choice but to trust them. They promised to take us to a refugee camp.



When we reached the camp I was so relieved. Finally, I was safe.



At the camp I met other children who talked about going to Europe. I couldn't help but think about it too.



But then I heard scary stories about the journey.

I heard you have to walk across the Sahara Desert for many days. I heard there is hunger and thirst, and no shade to shelter you from the sun.

I heard of all sorts of dangers. Big, bad, armed men who put you in prison and demand money from your parents.

It made me feel uncertain.

Today I attend school at the refugee camp,
where I have made many new friends. We play
together, and joke and laugh.

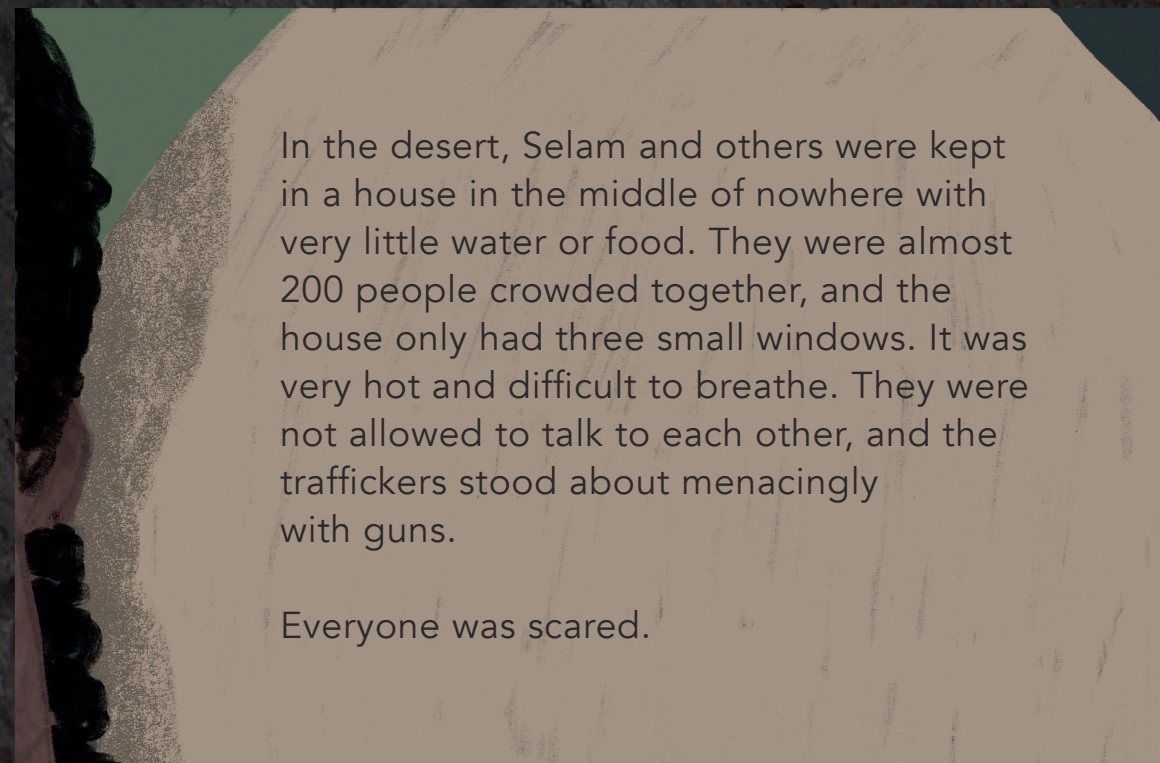
Sometimes when we come to class a
student is missing. Then we are told that
they have decided to take the journey.



My friend Selam wrote to me and told me she is in Europe.

She said that her journey through the desert took many days. She was forced to ride on overcrowded trucks that drove at terribly high speeds. The drive was so bumpy that some people fell off. She was surprised when the driver did not stop for them to get back on.





In the desert, Selam and others were kept in a house in the middle of nowhere with very little water or food. They were almost 200 people crowded together, and the house only had three small windows. It was very hot and difficult to breathe. They were not allowed to talk to each other, and the traffickers stood about menacingly with guns.

Everyone was scared.



After a few days, they were squeezed onto a truck again and driven for many hours. They didn't have any water or food and it was very hot under the sun. Some people passed out from hunger and thirst.

After driving almost a whole day, Selam saw the big sea. It was so beautiful, yet so scary.

They had to wait three days before they were put onto an old rubber boat. It was so small, and they were so many!

They traveled at sea for two days. On the third day, the boat stopped working and everyone started to panic. They were out of drinking water and there was no more food.



Selam said all she could think about was Lwam at the refugee camp, wondering what she was doing and whether she was having a meal.

Selam thought of all the stories she'd heard about other children disappearing at sea, never to be seen again. She felt both sad and afraid. She wondered if this would be the end of her journey.

Suddenly, somebody exclaimed, "Look, a ship!"

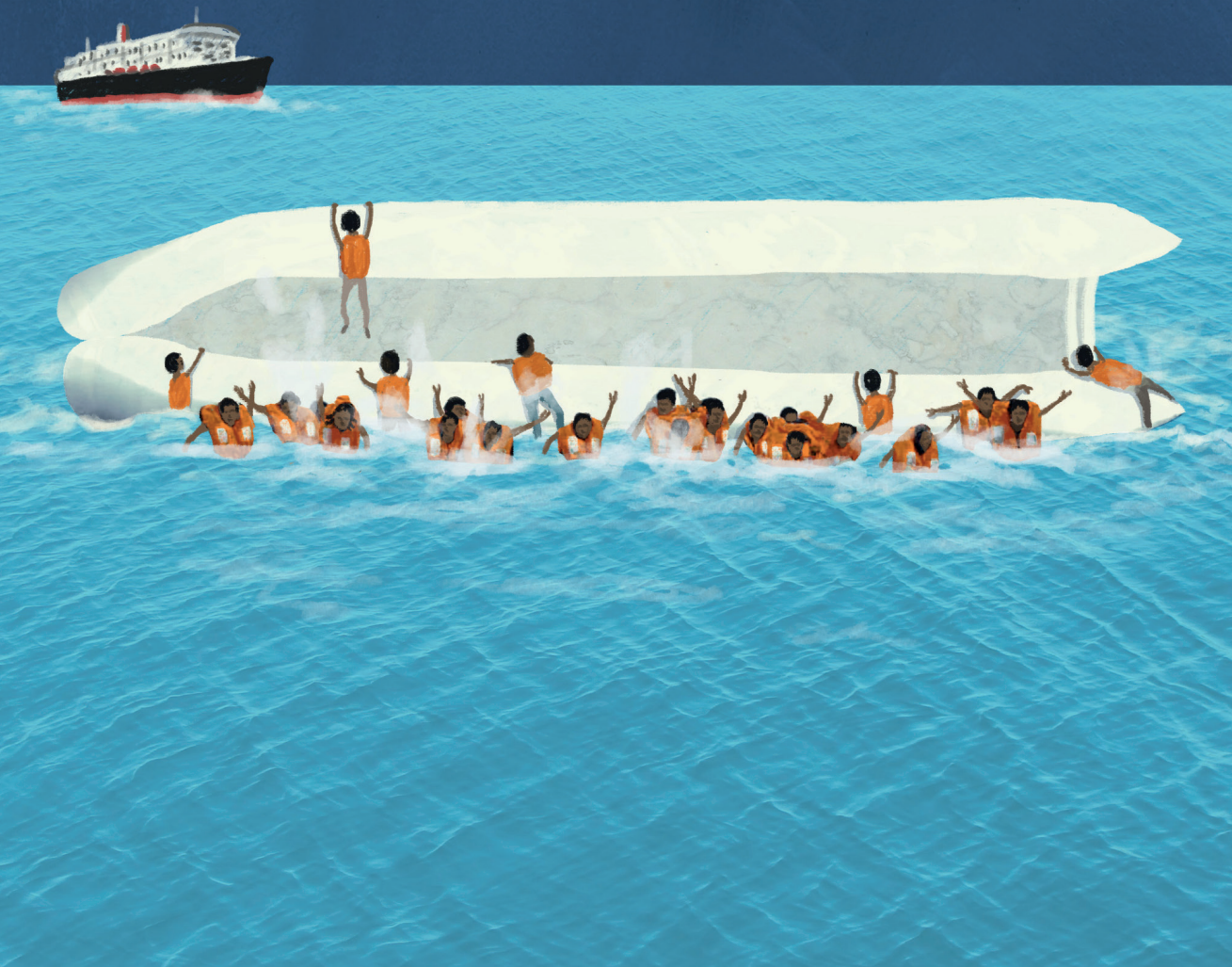
A big ship started coming toward them and everybody stood up and started to shout.

The sudden movement caused the boat to flip over, and Selam found herself in the water. There was panic everywhere!

Selam was gripped by fear as she struggled to stay afloat.



Suddenly, strong arms lifted her from the water.



She was taken onto the big ship where she was given food and water, and a warm place to sleep.

After two days, they arrived in Europe.



The traffickers don't care about people. They only care about money. Many people from my town tried to take the same journey as Selam and disappeared. No one knows what happened to them.

Selam told me she feels homesick and misses her family. She said that, in Europe, people speak strange languages and everyone is always in a hurry. She still hasn't gone to school and doesn't know when she will start.



Selam's letters have helped me realize that I'm very lucky to be able to go to school. I'm dreaming about attending a big university in the future and becoming a teacher.

I hope that one day I will get to see Selam again.





Lwam is a 12 year old girl living in Eritrea.
One day, after her best friend Selam leaves town to take
the journey to Europe, Lwam decides to take the journey
too. But when the letters start arriving from her friend,
Lwam is horrified by all the things she learns about the
journey and its dangers. She is forced to ask herself,
am I willing to risk my life for it too?

