

Hueber Lektüren

Road to Nowhere

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Road to Nowhere

Pauline O'Carolan

Illustrated by Elizabeth Botté

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Road to Nowhere

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Contents

Chapter 1	In a trap	4
Chapter 2	Not our problem	11
Chapter 3	The face at the window	15
Chapter 4	On Bluebell Farm	20
Chapter 5	A visit from Mr Mason	25
Chapter 6	Stone	30
Chapter 7	Finding Maria	38
Chapter 8	Caught in the net	47
Activities		55
Glossary		63
Key		65

In a trap

The voices outside the lorry were loud and angry. Maria began to cry. 'I'm frightened, Max,' she said.

Maxim put his arm around his younger sister and said, 'It will be okay.'

'What are they saying out there?' someone asked him.

Maxim could speak four languages, and French was one of them. 'There's trouble,' he said. 'Be quiet so I can listen.'

The Moldovan men, women and children lay quietly in the dark. They were under a false floor in the back of the lorry. Maxim put his ear against the side of the lorry and listened carefully.

'Well?' a voice asked out of the dark.

'We're turning back. We're going to have to try another way,' said Maxim. 'Another lorry off the Dover ferry was stopped. They found a group of people hidden behind bags of potatoes. The police are checking every lorry.'

'Ah,' said a different voice. 'So we are on the road to nowhere.'

Maxim thought, *Most of the Chinese people in the other lorry are dead. They were truly on the road to nowhere.* But he didn't tell the others. They were all in a trap and there was no way out.

Nick Bennett and his parents sat in the kitchen and ate their dinner silently. No one spoke at dinnertime except to say 'Pass the butter,' and 'Thank you'. Mr Bennett, Nick's father, liked to listen to the radio news.

Nick's dog Zip lay at his feet. The dog's tail beat against the leg of Nick's chair. Zip was hoping Nick would drop a piece of meat onto the floor for him.

The newsreader on the radio began another story: *This morning sixteen people were arrested by police in London and Kent. The police believe that they are people smugglers and have smuggled thousands of people into the United Kingdom over the last two years. The illegal immigrants were brought into the country by air, by sea and in vans and lorries. The people smugglers were arrested after thirty-six Chinese were found dead in a lorry on the Dover ferry yesterday.*

'I hope those people smugglers get locked up for a long time,' said Mr Bennett.

The newsreader continued with his stories. Mrs Bennett stood up from the table and went to make some tea.

Nick dropped some meat to Zip while his father wasn't looking. The dog ate hungrily. Nick began to think of other things. There was a note in his school bag. Later in the year his class was going on a trip to France for two weeks. Nick really wanted to go, but he knew what his parents would say. Neither of his parents had ever been abroad. When they talked about travel, Mr Bennett always said, 'There's never enough money for things we need on the farm.' Mrs Bennett always said, 'Home's best,' but Nick sometimes saw her watching travel programmes on television.

The newsreader began another story: *Dairy farmers in the area continue to have problems. One farmer in Ashford, Clive Dunn, is selling all ninety-five of his cows.*

The voice of the farmer came over the radio: *There's no money in dairy farming now. We farmers don't get enough money for our milk.*

'That's one less dairy farmer,' said Mr Bennett. 'But not me. And not you, lad.'

Nick looked down at the table. 'Yes, Dad.'

Mrs Bennett came in with tea and asked, 'Have you got any homework, Nick?'

'I've got lots,' said Nick. He took his bag and opened it. 'And

I've got a note for you.' He gave the note to his mother.

She read it and then said, 'Oh dear.'

Mr Bennett took the note and read it. He said, 'You don't want to go on that.'

Nick said, 'I really want to, Dad.'

'The Bennetts don't go abroad,' Mr Bennett began.

'You don't, Dad. But I do. I'm learning French. I'd like to go and talk to real French people.'

'Farmers don't need to speak French,' said Mr Bennett. 'Anyway, there's no money for holidays.'

'But, Dad,' said Nick, 'I could get a job after school and save the money myself. My friend Jake says his dad will give me a job in his garage.'

Mr Bennett said, 'Who'll do the work around here when you're at the garage?'

Mrs Bennett said, 'Go and do your homework, Nick.'

Nick threw his bag down onto the floor and said, 'If I have to be a farmer, I don't need to do homework.' He put on his coat then marched to the back door. 'Come on, Zip,' he said.

Zip stood up on his three legs and limped after Nick.

Mr Bennett called, 'Can you check old Flo in the top field? She's not looking too well.'

'Check her yourself,' said Nick quietly, but he stopped, pulled on his Wellington boots and picked up a torch. Nick didn't want to be a farmer but he loved the animals on Greenfields Farm.

He and Zip walked away from the house, past the barns and across the fields. It had rained all day and the ground was soft under his boots. Nick found Flo. She was lying with some other cows in the top field. He rubbed the old cow's head and ran his hands over her back. 'It's cold out here,' he said. 'A nice warm barn will be better for you tonight.' He helped Flo onto her feet and then walked her slowly down to the barn. The cow lay down on the hay inside.



‘Isn’t that better?’ said Nick as the cow turned her sad eyes to him.

Nick wasn’t ready to go back to the house. ‘Let’s go down to the beach,’ he said to Zip.

He pushed his hands into his pockets and marched along quickly. Zip limped along beside him.

Nick had found Zip when the dog was small. The dog’s leg was caught in a rabbit trap. Nick saved Zip’s life but the leg couldn’t be saved.

The Bennetts’ land went all the way down to the sea. Nick and Zip crossed the fields until they came to the edge of the cliffs. Then Nick turned the torch on and they followed a narrow path towards the beach below.

They were nearly at the beach when Nick saw headlights in the distance. There was a lane that ran between Greenfields Farm and the woods next to it. In summer the Bennetts’ neighbours used the beach for swimming and picnics, but it was unusual to see anyone drive down the lane at this time of night in early spring.

Nick watched the headlights come closer. A car drove slowly down the lane and onto the beach. It was pulling a boat on a trailer behind it. The car reversed until the trailer was in the water. The driver got out and went around to the back of the car. After a few minutes the boat slid into the water. The driver got back into the car and drove it up, away from the water, then stopped and got out.

Nick walked onto the beach. As he got closer the man noticed him and called, ‘Who’s there?’

Nick recognised the man in the moonlight. He turned off his torch and said, ‘Hello, Mr Mason.’

‘Oh, it’s you, Nick,’ said the man. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I’m just taking Zip for a walk before I do my homework,’ said Nick.

'I'm going night fishing with a friend,' Mr Mason said quickly. 'There are a lot of fish near the point.'

'I like fishing,' said Nick.

'My friend's late,' said Mr Mason.

Nick heard an engine and said, 'Is that someone coming now?' They stood together and watched a set of headlights get closer.

'You should go home if you want to get that homework done,' said Mr Mason.

'Yes, it's getting late,' Nick agreed. He watched a white van drive towards Mr Mason's car. It stopped but the driver stayed in the van.

'Good night, Nick,' said Mr Mason.

'Good night.' Nick walked further up the beach with Zip, but it was really too cold to enjoy it, and light rain was starting to fall. 'Home, Zip,' said Nick and turned back. He looked over at Mr Mason and the van driver as he passed behind them. They were talking quietly beside the van. Then Mr Mason went and got into the boat and started its engine. The other man stayed on the beach and smoked a cigarette.

Maxim and Maria were sitting in the dark in the hold of a fishing boat. They could feel the waves against the boat. It was pushed from side to side. Maria was holding Maxim's hand tightly. For Maxim it was worse than being in the lorry. There were more people here in the hold. Everyone smelt bad and some people were sick.

The boat stopped and the engine was turned off. Then there were voices outside. Someone took off the cover of the hold and a torch shone down into the darkness.

'Come!' said a man's voice. 'We are here. England. You must hurry!'

The people tried to stand, but their legs were weak and some people fell to the floor again.

'Climb the ladder quickly!'

The fishermen pulled and dragged them up a ladder to the deck of the boat.

'Max,' said Maria, 'are we really in England or are the fishermen going to throw us into the sea?'

'They won't do that,' said Maxim. 'They want us alive, not dead.' But he didn't know if that was true. Perhaps they would end up at the bottom of the sea.

The Moldovans sat on the deck. They saw lights flashing and could hear another boat coming towards them. It stopped beside the fishing boat.

The captain of the fishing boat said, 'Come on. Into the boat. Women and children first.'

'No, Max!' Maria cried. But she was pushed over the side and into the smaller boat below.

Maxim called, 'I'll be next, Maria. I'll see you soon.'

The boat sailed away towards the shore. Maxim watched it until he couldn't see it any more.

Not our problem

Nick and Zip climbed up the cliff path. At the top Nick looked out to sea. He couldn't see the boat. It was sailing without lights. Then he saw a light flash a long way from the shore. It flashed again. Nick looked down at the beach. The headlights of the van flashed too.

Nick stopped. 'This is strange, Zip,' he said. 'Night fishing? I don't think so.' They sat at the top of the cliff and waited. Nick was cold. *I should get back home*, he thought, *but I have to know what's going on here*.

He heard the boat's engine. It was coming closer. Suddenly the van driver turned on his headlights and Nick could see quite well. The boat was sailing in to the beach and it was full of people. When the boat was close to the shore the people got out into the shallow water. The van driver spoke to them and they climbed into the van. Mr Mason took the boat out to sea again and the van driver turned off the headlights. There was no noise from the van. The driver smoked another cigarette.

Zip suddenly barked. Nick saw two bright eyes in the darkness. A fox was running towards the woods. Zip ran after it. The van driver looked up but didn't leave the van. He looked back to sea and Nick went quietly away after Zip.

Nick's parents were in bed when he and Zip got back from the beach. Nick washed and got ready for bed. He sat at his desk for a few minutes and started to do his French homework but he was tired. He pushed the books aside and went to bed.

Maxim saw Maria for a few minutes when he and the second group of Moldovans got out of the boat at the beach and into the van. The van drove away from the beach. Maria held Maxim's hand tightly again. It wasn't long before the van



stopped. The doors opened. Two men stood outside and looked into the van. One was the man from the boat. He wore a thick black sweater, black jeans and big boots. He had a black woollen hat on his head. The other man was younger and wore black jeans too. His coat was blue and his red hair was thin on top.

Blue Coat spoke first. Maxim found his English difficult to understand. 'My name is Stone,' he said. 'I am your boss. You work for me. I have jobs for you all.' He put his hand on the older man's arm. 'Some of you will be staying here with Mr Mason. You'll be picking daffodils.'

'What are daffodils?' someone asked.

Mr Mason said, 'Daffodils are flowers.'

Maxim heard one of the other Moldovans say, 'That can't be too hard.'

Stone pulled a piece of paper from his pocket. 'These people get out here.' He read a list of Moldovan names.

When he read Maxim's name, Maxim asked, 'What about my sister?'

'No,' said Stone. 'She's too small and not strong enough. But you get out of the van now.'

Maria held Maxim tightly, but Stone pushed her off him. She screamed and let go. The other men who were to stay on the farm got out. Maxim could still hear Maria's screams as the van drove away.

Mr Mason said, 'She'll be okay. Stone will find her a good job.' But he wouldn't look at Maxim. He turned away quickly and said, 'This way.' The men followed him. No one said anything.

The next morning, Nick woke late. He dressed quickly and went out to the barn. His father was there with the cows.

'You're late,' said Mr Bennett. 'I can't get the animals ready for milking by myself. Your mother's gone to the market.'

Nick began fixing the milking machines to the cows that were still waiting. When everything was done Nick turned to his father and began to talk.

'Dad,' he said, 'I saw something strange last night.'

'Oh yes?' His father kept sweeping the barn floor.

Nick told his father what he had seen at the beach. When he told his father that he'd spoken to Mr Mason, Mr Bennett said, 'You shouldn't have done that.'

'But, Dad, I didn't know that he was doing something wrong.'

'You don't know that he *was* doing anything wrong,' said his father.

'What was he doing with those people then?' Nick asked.

'I don't want to know about it. And you don't either.'

Nick was surprised. 'But shouldn't we tell the police?'

Mr Bennett's face went red. 'I've known Fred Mason all his life. I'm not going to tell the police about him. It's their job to catch him – *if* he's doing anything wrong.'

'Yes, but what if he's a people smuggler? You always say people smugglers should be locked up.'

'I don't want to hear another word about it,' said Nick's father. 'And don't tell your mother. Or anyone else. It's not our problem.'

Nick didn't reply. He took the milking machine off the cows.

He understood that his father didn't want to get Mr Mason into trouble. But he knew people smuggling was wrong.

The face at the window

For the next few days Nick often thought about the people he had seen at the beach that night. At the weekend he helped his parents on the farm. He tried to talk to his father again but old Flo the cow died and his father didn't want to talk.

After school on Monday Nick stood at the bus stop. It was another wet day. The bus was late. A few other pupils waited too. Nick stared at the shops across the road without really seeing them. There was a fish shop, a grocer and a travel agency. There weren't many people in the street.

Nick watched a plane fly across the cloudy sky. He'd never get away from Greenfields Farm to see more exciting places. He kicked an empty drink can angrily. He kicked it too hard and it flew across the road and hit the wall of the travel agency. Nick looked around. No one at the bus stop seemed to notice.

Nick looked up. He saw something move in a window above the travel agency. A girl was looking down at the street. When she saw that Nick was watching her she quickly closed the curtains. *Strange girl*, thought Nick.

He crossed the road, picked up the can and put it in a bin. He looked into the window of the travel agency. On the dusty window was painted RED FOX TRAVEL. The pictures of Italy, Spain and Greece in the window looked old. There were shelves around the walls inside. Some were empty. Others had brightly coloured brochures on them. Nick wanted to go in and get some brochures. He looked for the bus but it still wasn't coming. He called to a girl at the bus stop, 'Hey, Jenna, I'm going in here. Call me if you see the bus.'

He walked inside. No one was there. He looked around and picked up brochures. Some had nice pictures in them. Some were so old that the paper was turning yellow.



Nick heard a voice shouting angrily upstairs. Someone began to cry. A door closed loudly. Then it was quiet. Nick wondered what was happening. He began to put the brochures back on the shelves.

A voice behind him said, 'What are you doing? Don't touch anything.' A large woman was standing in the room.

'I was just looking at brochures,' Nick said quickly.

The woman said, 'I don't run my travel agency for school children.'

Nick looked at her closely. She was wearing a grey suit with a red shirt. They were too tight for her. The skirt was short.

'Who do you run it for then?' Nick asked. 'Your brochures are all old.' He held one of the yellow ones out to her. 'Look at this.'

'Out!' the woman said. Nick could smell cigarettes on her breath.

Just then he heard Jenna's voice calling, 'Nick! The bus is coming!' He picked up his bag and ran out of the door.

Nick got on the bus. As he looked out of the window, a white van pulled up outside Red Fox Travel. Nick saw the woman walk into the street and begin to talk to the driver of the van. Nick sat back and closed his eyes. It was a long slow journey back to Greenfields Farm.

Rain ran down the windows of the van as it drove out of the town. Maria was too sad for tears. The fat woman made her sit in the front seat between her and the man in the blue coat.

Maria thought she would never see her brother again. Once, she had thought that the death of her parents was the worst thing that could ever happen to her. She knew now that it wasn't.

Nick found his mother and Zip in the kitchen. 'Was the bus late again, love?' she said.

'It's always late, Mum,' Nick said. 'I can't wait until I can drive to school.'

'I don't think your father will let you do that,' said his mother.

'No,' said Nick. 'He'd say the petrol cost too much.'

His mother poured him a cup of tea and asked, 'Did you have a good day?'

Nick told his mother about the woman in the travel agency and the girl at the window upstairs. 'I think the woman was hitting the girl when I went into the shop,' he said.

Mrs Bennett shook her head. 'Poor thing. Some people shouldn't have children.'

Nick finished his tea and said, 'I must get out to the barn. Dad and the cows will be ready for me.'

As Nick walked into the barn his father nodded at him. Nothing was said then or at dinner. Mr Bennett was thoughtful.

After dinner Nick did his homework. Later he went downstairs to get something to drink and was surprised that the kitchen door was closed. He could hear his parents' voices inside. 'I don't want him to stay at school any longer,' his father was saying. 'The place just fills his head with ideas. Then he gets angry with us.'

His mother said, 'We could try to give him the money for the trip, dear. Just once.'

'Where's the money going to come from?'

'I could give him the money I get from selling eggs,' said Mrs Bennett. 'I'd like to.'

'That money's yours,' said Mr Bennett. 'Nick needs to understand that the farm will be his one day. It's his duty to keep it going.'

Nick was getting angry.

'He wants to go to university,' his mother said. 'He's clever, you know. I really don't think he'll be happy on the farm.'

'University! He can forget that idea,' said Mr Bennett.

Nick pushed the door open and said, 'Thanks for trying to tell Dad what I want, Mum.' He stared at his father coldly. 'I hate this farm. Why would I want to work as hard as you? You never have a holiday. Mum never has nice things. I want to stay at school and then I want to study history and languages at university. I'll get a good job and I'll live in the middle of London!'

Mr Bennett's face went red. 'The Bennetts have farmed this land for years,' he shouted, 'and that's not going to stop just because you've got ideas in your head about history and languages!'

'Now, Rod,' said Mrs Bennett to her husband, 'be fair –'

But Mr Bennett kept shouting at Nick. 'You'll keep this farm going, lad, do you hear me? It's your duty.'

'I'm going out!' Nick shouted back. He went out of the kitchen, closed the back door loudly behind him and marched away into the night.

In the farm building Maxim waited with the other men for Stone to arrive. His back and his hands hurt from working in the fields of daffodils. The men were dirty. They picked daffodils from early in the morning until the evening. They ate and then slept for a few hours before Stone came in the van and drove them to a place where they put chicken pieces into packets for supermarkets. Then they were driven back to the farm, where they slept for a few more hours.

Maxim had liked daffodils once. Now he hated the pretty golden bells.

On Bluebell Farm

Nick turned away from the sea and walked towards Fred Mason's farm – Bluebell Farm. Nick's father always laughed at that name. 'Bluebell's a name for a cow,' he said, 'not for a farm.'

Nick heard barking behind him. It was Zip. 'Mum let you out, did she?' Nick said.

It was a fine night and the moonlight was bright. He walked along the lane beside Bluebell Farm. Fred Mason's daughters were a lot younger than Nick and he hadn't been to Bluebell Farm for years. But he'd heard all about it. There were no cows on Bluebell Farm now. These days Fred Mason grew daffodils in the spring and vegetables in the rest of the year. He was doing well.

Zip began to bark and pushed through a gap in the hedge beside the lane. *He must have smelt a rabbit or a fox*, thought Nick. He called Zip but the dog didn't come back. Nick pushed through the hedge after him.

Nick was surprised to see lights in Bluebell Farm's old dairy and in some of the barns. *What's happening in there?* he thought. He went and tried to look in the windows but they were covered by curtains. There was a group of caravans next to the old dairy. In one of them, Nick could hear a child crying. Again he tried to look in the windows but they were covered too. *The farm workers must be living here*, he thought. *Are they the people from the boat?*

Suddenly Nick felt a wet nose on his hand. Zip was back. 'Come on,' he said to the dog. 'It's time to go back home.'

They turned back. They walked past the farm buildings and found the gap in the hedge again. They were just back in the lane when Nick saw a van driving towards Bluebell Farm.

The van turned in through the farm gate. 'Is that the van from the beach?' Nick asked Zip. 'Let's see if we can see the driver this time.'

Once again they went through the hedge. 'Quiet, boy,' said Nick to Zip. Nick got as close as he could without being seen. The van stopped and the doors opened. Some men climbed out of the van. They looked tired. The driver got out and knocked on the door of the old dairy. Some more men came out of the building and climbed into the van. Nick couldn't see the driver's face, but he was wearing a blue coat.

When the men were in the van, the driver got back in and drove the van over to the farmhouse. Nick followed with Zip close beside him. Fred Mason came out of the house and spoke to the driver for a few minutes. Then the van drove off again and Mr Mason went back inside.

Nick saw Mr Mason's new car next to the house. It was a BMW. Nick wished he could drive it. He was learning to drive his mother's car and it was old.

Garry Stone drove the van fast. He always said there were only two ways to drive – fast and faster. Garry was a happy man these days. He was rich, and getting richer. It was difficult to make his wife Valda happy, but she loved all the money.

Valda wasn't happy about her new maid. 'Why did you bring me such a silly child?' she had asked Garry. 'I don't want a maid who cries all the time.'

Valda took the new girl with her to the travel agency each day. She couldn't leave her at home. There were men putting new central heating into their big old country house.

Stone drove the van even faster. As he steered around a corner, the van slid towards the side of the road.

Nick didn't want to go home yet. 'Let's go along the lane as far as the main road, Zip,' he said.



It was a long walk. They reached the road and walked along it. As they came around a corner, Nick saw something in front of them. The white van was lying on its side. It had gone off the road into a hedge. There were some men sitting on the side of the road. Nick ran to them and called, 'Are you okay? What happened?'

The men talked to each other quietly in a foreign language but they didn't answer Nick. They didn't look very friendly.

Nick looked in the front of the van but the driver wasn't in there. 'Where's the driver?' Nick asked. 'Has he gone for help?'

The men still didn't answer him.

'Is anyone badly hurt?' Nick asked.

A young man who was sitting apart from the others said, 'My arm is broken, I think. And my head hurts. There are some other men still in the back of the van.'

Nick went to him and said, 'Why don't those men talk to me? I want to help.'

'We have no papers,' said the young man. 'We aren't allowed to talk to people.'

'Oh,' said Nick. 'I understand. You're illegal immigrants.'

'Shh,' the young man said. 'Don't say that. They'll hurt you.'

'There's a phone box that way,' Nick pointed along the road. 'I'll go and call an ambulance.'

One of the other men called out, 'Maxim!'

'Is that your name?' Nick asked.

Maxim nodded, but then he held his head.

'I'm Nick,' said Nick. 'I just want to help you.'

'The others won't let you help. You must go,' Maxim said. 'Just go.'

Nick said, 'Okay,' but then he quietly added, 'I'm still going to call an ambulance.'

Maxim tried to stand. He put his good hand on Nick's arm. 'Nick, you *can* help me. Please find my sister.'

‘Where is she?’

Maxim closed his eyes. He said, ‘Stone,’ and then fell back onto the ground.

Nick went to help him but a man said, ‘You! Go now!’

Three of the bigger men came towards Nick. Zip barked at them. One of them picked up a stick from the ground. Nick was scared that they’d hurt Zip. He pulled Zip away and said, ‘I’m going!’ and hurried away. He looked behind him. One of the men was helping Maxim. The others were watching Nick.

I have to call the ambulance. Some of them may be hurt worse than Maxim, he thought. I wish I had a mobile phone.

Nick and Zip waited by the phone box until the ambulance came. Then Nick took the ambulance officers to where the van was. It was still there, lying on its side, but the men were gone. The ambulance officers looked around. They saw blood in the van.

A police car arrived soon after. Nick told the police officers about the night on the beach. He told them about Fred Mason and the man in the blue coat. He told them about the workers from Bluebell Farm. He told them about what Maxim had said. He told them that Maxim wanted to find his sister and that he’d said one word – ‘stone’.

The officers wanted to take Nick home but he said, ‘My dog and I can walk. I don’t want to wake my parents.’

As Nick walked home he remembered what his father had said. ‘I’ve known Fred Mason all his life. I’m not going to tell the police about him. It’s their job to catch him...’

Well, I’ve told them about him now, thought Nick. And he felt he had done the right thing.

A visit from Mr Mason

Nick and his father milked the cows together the next morning. They didn't talk. They didn't talk at evening milking either.

Nick left the barn with Zip. He was walking towards the farmhouse when he heard an angry voice. 'Hey, young Nick, I want to talk to you.'

Nick turned and saw Fred Mason getting out of his car. Mason marched over to Nick, took his arm and shook him. 'You've been talking to the police, you young fool.'

Zip began to bark.

Nick said, 'Let go. You're hurting me!'

Mr Mason put his face close to Nick's and said quietly, 'Some of my friends aren't happy with you.'

Nick's father called from behind them, 'Fred, what's wrong?'

Mr Mason dropped Nick's arm quickly. 'I've been having a word with Nick,' he said to Mr Bennett. 'And now I'll have a word with you and Helen, if that's all right.'

Mr Bennett's face was suddenly angry. 'What's Nick done?'

'Can we go inside?' said Mr Mason.

They all took off their boots and walked inside in their socks. Zip followed them.

Mrs Bennett was cooking in the kitchen. 'Hello, Fred,' she said. 'We haven't had a visit from you for a long time.'

'Well, I'm always busy,' Mr Mason smiled at her. 'You know what that's like!'

'Sit down, Fred,' said Mrs Bennett.

The farmers sat down at the kitchen table. Nick stood.

'What's Nick done?' asked Mr Bennett again.

'I'm upset, Rod,' Mr Mason said to Nick's father. 'Nick has been telling stories to the police.'

'It wasn't a story,' said Nick. 'There was an accident.'

'I don't understand, Fred,' said Mrs Bennett.

'Nick found an empty van by the road last night,' Mr Mason said. 'He called the police and for some reason he told them a story about a group of illegal immigrants living on my farm. The police woke us up in the middle of the night. They searched my workers' caravans and the old dairy. Jackie was very angry because she couldn't get the twins to sleep again.'

'Did they find anything wrong?' Mr Bennett asked.

'Of course not. All our workers have papers.'

I wonder who they bought them from, thought Nick.

Mrs Bennett said, 'Why would Nick make up a story like that?'

'I didn't,' said Nick.

'He also told the police that I was smuggling people onto the beach by boat,' Mr Mason laughed.

'I saw you,' said Nick.

Nick looked at his father, but Mr Bennett gave him an angry look and said, 'That'll do, lad.' Then he turned to Mr Mason and said, 'Fred, I'm sorry the boy's been causing trouble. He won't do it again.'

'Would you like to eat with us?' asked Mrs Bennett.

Nick said, 'I have to do my homework.'

'You'll eat with us, lad,' said Mr Bennett. 'Sit down.'

Mrs Bennett said, 'Lay the table first, please, Nick.'

Nick was angry, but he laid the table and sat down. Mrs Bennett brought out a big pie and some vegetables, and they all ate. Zip sat at Nick's feet. Zip didn't like pie nights.

'You must be making some money from those daffodils, Fred,' said Mr Bennett with his mouth full of pie. 'I'm sure that new car of yours wasn't cheap.'

'Growing daffodils is good business, Rod,' said Mr Mason. 'The supermarkets can't take enough of them. Have you thought of putting crops into some of your fields?'

'Not really,' Mr Bennett replied. 'I'm an animal man. I love my cows. But they don't make me any money.'

'I could lease some land from you and grow daffodils on it,' said Mr Mason. 'I'd pay you well.'

Mr Bennett looked interested.

'I'd need to put some of my workers on your land too,' Mr Mason continued. 'They could sleep in caravans. If Helen fed them I'd pay you for that too. Of course, you don't give them anything special to eat,' he said to Mrs Bennett. 'Just enough so they aren't hungry and can work hard.'

Nick couldn't believe that his parents were listening to this. He wanted to throw Fred Mason out of the house. He ate quickly and then said, 'I have to do my homework.'

'You can help me wash up first,' said Mrs Bennett.

As Nick helped his mother, he listened to the men. His father seemed very interested in Mr Mason's plan to lease some of the Greenfields land.

At last Mr Mason said, 'Well, I must go. Jackie will want me to read to the twins before bed. Thanks for dinner.' He looked at Nick. 'I hope you don't go telling stories to the police again, Nick. It doesn't do anyone any good.'

'He won't,' said Mr Bennett and he walked to the back door with Mr Mason. Nick heard his father say quietly, 'You don't use any illegal immigrants on the farm, do you, Fred? I couldn't have illegal immigrants here.'

Fred Mason laughed. 'No, Rod, of course you couldn't.'

Nick's father came back into the kitchen and said, 'I want you, Nick. Upstairs!' They went up to Nick's room.

'I told you not to tell the police anything,' said Mr Bennett.

'Dad, there really was an accident. People were hurt. The driver left them. What could I do?'

His father had no answer for that.

Nick asked, 'Are you really going to lease some of our land to him?'

'So it's *our* land now?' said his father.

Father and son stared at each other.

'You're a coward, Dad,' said Nick. 'You know what Mason is doing, but you won't do what's right.'

'Don't you call me that,' said Mr Bennett angrily. 'I'm not a coward. I just don't want any trouble. Around here we don't cause trouble for our neighbours. Do you understand?'

Nick didn't reply. Mr Bennett walked out of the room and closed the door. Nick heard him walking slowly down the stairs.

The Stones were sitting together in their living room. They were drinking wine and smoking. Maria was working hard. Valda said the men who were putting in the central heating were making everything dusty, so she was making Maria clean all the floors and wash all the windows and glasses.

Maria listened to the Stones talking. Her English wasn't very good but she understood more words every day. She read the brochures at the travel agency and read Valda's books in bed at night.

Stone was talking about the van accident the night before. Maria wanted to cry out, 'Was my brother there? Was he hurt?' But she couldn't.

'The doctor's been to see them all,' said Stone. 'He says most of them are okay but a few of them should be in hospital.'

'We can't take them there,' said Valda. She took a sip of wine then added, 'They'll live.'

Tears fell from Maria's eyes. How could she find out about Maxim? She walked quickly back into the kitchen and washed the same glass over and over again.

'Maria? Where are you, girl?' called Valda.

Maria wiped her eyes and went slowly back into the living room. She looked at Valda Stone. How she hated the woman! She smelt bad and her skirt was too short.

'Come quickly when I call you,' said Valda.

Maria thought of her mother. Her mother had smelt sweet and her hands had been gentle. Maria began to cry.

'Oh, will you stop crying, you silly girl,' said Valda.

Maria ran out of the room and up the stairs. She sat on her bed and looked out of the window. 'I must go,' she said to herself. 'I must run far, far away.'

Stone

After school on Friday Nick waited at the bus stop as usual. He tried not to think about the weekend – two days on the farm with his parents. He looked across the road towards Red Fox Travel. Suddenly the window above the travel agency opened and Nick saw the girl again. She started to climb out of the window. She reached across to the drainpipe that ran down to the ground.

That drainpipe isn't strong enough, Nick thought.

He was going to call out, 'Be careful!' but before he could, one of the other pupils said, 'Here comes the bus.'

Nick looked up the road to where the bus was coming. When he looked back, the girl had slid down the drainpipe to the street. Then the door of the travel agency opened and the large woman rushed out. The girl screamed and ran across the road in front of the bus. The bus suddenly came to a stop with a loud noise, hitting a parking sign at the side of the road. The pupils jumped back. At the same time the girl kept running, straight towards Nick. He caught her in his arms and said, 'Are you okay?' There was fear in her eyes.

'Hey, watch where you're going!' the bus driver shouted.

The woman from the travel agency was crossing the road.

'Here's your mother,' said Nick.

The girl whispered to Nick, 'She is not my mother. She is... I am her maid. I want to get away. I must find my brother.'

'Where's your brother?' Nick asked.

'On a farm,' said the girl. 'Bluebell Farm.'

'Are you Maria?' Nick asked. He couldn't believe he'd found the girl without trying.

'Yes.'

The driver climbed out of the bus and looked where the bus



had hit the sign. 'Who's going to pay for this?' he said angrily to the woman from the travel agency.

Nick said quietly to the girl, 'I'll get a police officer. He'll help you.'

'No! I can't go to the police,' said Maria. 'I have no papers. They'll send me home.'

Nick put his arm around her and said, 'Come on.'

But Maria shook off his arm and began to run away.

The woman from the travel agency called after her, 'Maria! Stop! Uncle Ivan will be angry.'

Maria stopped immediately. She stood still for a few moments and then turned and walked slowly back towards the bus stop.

The woman took her hand and pulled her across the road. 'Tell the bus company to call me,' she said to the driver.

Nick called after them, 'Maria!' She looked behind her and shook her head. Her face was white.

Nick watched the woman pull the girl into the travel agency and shut the door. A 'Closed' sign appeared in the window.

The bus driver said, 'Are you getting on the bus?' The other pupils were on the bus now and were staring at Nick. He climbed onto the bus and the driver said, 'It's best not to get mixed up in family fights, lad.'

Nick nodded and sat down in his seat. What could he do? He stared out of the window as the driver started his engine. Above the travel agency door he saw a small notice he'd never seen before. It said 'Proprietor: Valda Stone'. It all became clear to Nick. When Maxim had said 'stone' he'd meant the name 'Stone' – Valda Stone.

That night Nick waited until his parents had gone to bed. Then he went downstairs, found Zip by the kitchen fire and left the house with the dog. He was dressed in black jeans and a black jacket. He wore a black woollen hat and carried a torch.

He and Zip were soon at Bluebell Farm. First Nick went up to the old dairy. The curtains were tightly closed over the windows and no lights were showing. Nick couldn't hear any noises inside. He tried to open the door but it was locked. He took a deep breath and knocked. No one came to the door. He went up to one of the caravans and knocked on the door. A man opened it a little way and looked out at Nick.

'I'm looking for Maxim,' said Nick. 'Do you know him?'

The man shook his head and closed the door quickly. At the next caravan a woman opened the door.

'Do you know Maxim?' Nick asked. 'Do you know where he is?'

The woman looked behind her and then whispered, 'Maxim with long dark hair?'

'He has a sister called Maria,' said Nick.

'Why do you want to find him?' said the woman.

'I'm his friend,' said Nick.

The woman looked closely at Nick. 'You are not from the police?'

'I still go to school!' said Nick.

The woman looked behind her again and then said, 'He's with some others in a barn near the woods. The farmer put them there.' Then she said, 'I must go,' and shut the door.

Nick and Zip walked towards the woods. They followed a narrow track and found the barn. In the moonlight Nick saw fresh marks from car tyres on the ground. There was a light shining from under the barn door. Nick could hear voices inside. He knocked on the door and the voices stopped. After a few moments someone opened the door a little way.

Nick was scared now.

'What do you want?' a deep voice asked.

'I want to see Maxim,' said Nick.

A voice from inside said something and then the man at the door said, 'Okay. Come in.'

Nick and Zip walked inside. Zip stayed close to Nick, ready for trouble.

There were about seven or eight men sitting or lying on mattresses on the floor. Maxim was one of them. His arm was in a plaster cast.

Nick sat down beside him and asked, 'How's your arm?'

'It's much better. A doctor came. He put this plaster cast on it.'

'Is everyone okay now?' Nick asked.

'Not really,' Maxim replied. 'None of us is able to work. The farmer isn't happy. He doesn't know what to do with us.'

Nick nodded and then said, 'I found Maria.'

Maxim's eyes opened wide. 'You did?'

Nick told Maxim his story. He didn't tell him that Valda Stone hit Maria. He just said, 'Maria is very unhappy.'

Maxim was quiet for a while, and then began to talk. 'We had a great life at home in Moldova. Our father taught at the university in Chisinau. Then he and our mother went to Romania for a few days. They were driving home...' It was difficult for Maxim to continue. 'A bus hit their car. They were killed.'

Nick sat quietly. What would it be like not to have any parents? 'I'm sorry, Maxim,' he said, and touched the young man's shoulder.

Maxim went on. 'Then things got bad. Our mother's brother came to Moldova from Russia. Uncle Ivan took our apartment and all the family's money. Then he sold us to a criminal gang. They sold us to Stone.'

'How could your uncle do that?' Nick said.

'He didn't want us. He could make money from us.' Maxim saw that Nick felt sorry for him. 'Some families have bad people in them, Nick.'

'Couldn't anyone save you?' Nick asked.

'It all happened very quickly,' said Maxim. 'Uncle Ivan said

he had come to help. Everyone believed him. Then one night some men came to the apartment. They gave our uncle a lot of money and took us away with them. Uncle Ivan told us to be good and never to come back to Moldova. He said that if we did we would be sorry.'

That's why Maria went back to Valda Stone. She was scared of Uncle Ivan, Nick thought.

Suddenly there was the sound of a car close by.

'Someone is coming!' said Maxim. 'You must go, Nick.'

'How can we get out?' Nick asked. He looked around, but there was only one door.

'You must hide,' said Maxim. He spoke quickly to the other men. One pointed to a ladder going up to the roof.

Nick shook his head. 'Zip can't climb.'

'Lie on the mattress in the corner. We'll cover you up,' said Maxim.

Nick and Zip lay down. One of the men covered them with some dusty blankets. Two of the men sat on the edge of the mattress. Nick and Zip were well hidden. 'Quiet, boy,' whispered Nick to Zip.

The door of the barn opened. Nick listened as a man spoke quietly but angrily. 'My daffodils can't pick themselves.' It was Mr Mason. 'I need more workers, Garry. And I want these men out of here. What if I get caught with them here?'

Another voice spoke with a northern English accent. 'All's well, Fred. I've got a new lot coming in from France by sea tomorrow night. These men will be going back in the same boat.' Then the man spoke louder, to the Moldovan men. 'Listen to me. You're going back to France tomorrow night. Understand?'

Nick heard footsteps coming closer. Dust from the blanket got into his nose and he wanted to sneeze. He was worried that Zip was going to bark. But the dog lay next to him very quietly.

The two men walked around the room. Nick waited for one

of them to ask what was under the blanket.

After a while Nick heard the barn door open and close. He sneezed then. Maxim took the blankets off him.

'Thank you,' said Nick.

'You must go now,' said one of the Moldovan men to Nick.

'I'm going to come with you,' said Maxim to Nick. 'I can't go back to France. I can't leave Maria behind in England. I must save her from Valda Stone.'

'How?' Nick asked. 'She may not live at the travel agency.'

'We'll find her,' said Maxim. 'We have to.' He spoke in Moldovan to the other men. Then he said, 'They don't want me to go. But they know I must save my sister.' He shook hands with the men and then he and Nick left the barn with Zip.

Nick said, 'We'll have to go into town. I'll take my mother's car.' Then he stopped and said, 'But I'm a learner driver – I can only drive with an adult driver in the car with me.'

'That's okay,' smiled Maxim, and he reached into a pocket and pulled out a torn piece of paper. 'I have a driving licence. It's Moldovan, but it's a driving licence!'

They walked across the fields to Greenfields Farm. Nick said, 'I've got an idea! Wait here, Maxim. Come on, Zip.' He quietly let himself back into the farmhouse and found the phone book. He looked for the name Stone. There was an entry that looked right: *Stone, G & V Hadley Hall, Marden*. Marden was a small village about ten miles away. Nick closed the kitchen door so his parents wouldn't hear him and called the number.

A woman answered. 'Hello?' Nick knew the voice at once. It was Valda Stone. 'Who is this?' she asked.

Nick said, 'Sorry, wrong number,' and put down the phone quietly. 'You have to stay here, Zip,' he said. The dog lay on the floor. 'Good boy.'

He went back to Maxim and said, 'Let's go. You get into the car. I'll push it out of the gate. I don't want my parents to hear.'

Maxim got in and held the steering wheel with his good hand. Nick pushed the car and it rolled quietly down to the gate and out to the lane. Then he got in and started the engine.

'I know where the Stones live,' he said. 'We'll go there.'

Finding Maria

It was strange driving through the lanes and narrow roads in the dark. Nick drove carefully. He hadn't driven at night before.

'Do you think we should ask the police to help us?' said Nick. 'They're trying to stop illegal immigrants coming into England. They'd be happy to catch the people smugglers.'

'I'm sure they would be,' said Maxim. 'But they would send us back to Moldova. Uncle Ivan would get us again. He has friends everywhere in Chisinau.'

'So what are you going to do?'

Maxim said, 'I will find Maria and we will go to London. There is someone there who may help us. In the big city we can disappear. No one will find us.'

They drove on. At last they came to Marden, the village near Hadley Hall. Nick stopped and looked at a map that his mother kept in the car.

'We're nearly there,' he said. 'Look out for a bridge. We turn down a lane just past that.'

After a few minutes Maxim said, 'Here's a bridge.' Nick turned and they drove down a narrow lane until they came to a gate with a sign beside it: HADLEY HALL.

Nick turned the car around and parked the car facing away from the gate. 'We may need to get away quickly,' he said.

Nick and Maxim got out and were surprised that the gate wasn't locked. They walked through and followed the driveway towards the big house. They stopped behind some bushes. There were lights on in some of the rooms and the curtains were open in the downstairs rooms. Nick could see the Stones sitting together in one of the rooms. He could see Valda's face. Her husband had red hair. The two of them were smoking



and looking at some papers on a low table in front of them.

'Maria must be in bed,' Maxim whispered.

'Let's go around here,' Nick whispered. 'If we can't see her we'll have to find a way inside.'

They walked around the house and looked in each of the windows they passed. They came to a kitchen, and there was Maria. She was washing dishes.

Maxim went up and knocked softly on the window. Maria looked up and dropped the dish she was holding into the water. Her face was suddenly happy. Then she disappeared from the window, a door opened and she ran out into her brother's arms.

They talked quietly in Moldovan for a while and then Maxim said, 'Nick, we're lucky that you saw Maria in town that day. But Maria, why didn't you run away from this place? The door wasn't locked.'

'They told me Uncle Ivan would find me. And they have dogs,' said Maria. 'Great big dogs. They let them out when they go to bed.' She said to Nick, 'I'm scared of dogs.'

Maxim took her hand. 'We must go now.'

'I will get my things,' said Maria.

'There's no time,' said Maxim. 'They'll hear you.'

'But my photographs...' said Maria. 'Please, Max.'

'Hurry then,' said her brother. 'We'll wait here.'

Maria hurried back into the house. It seemed a long time to Nick, but in a few minutes she was back.

They began to walk back to the car. The Stones had closed the living room curtains now.

'They must be going to bed,' said Maria. 'Soon the dogs will be out.'

They walked faster. Ahead of them, they saw that the gate was closed.

'Didn't we leave the gate open?' Nick asked Maxim.

'Yes, I think we did,' said Maxim.

They stood for a moment staring at the gate, then suddenly they heard a voice from the shadows. 'Well, well. What have we here?'

It was the voice Nick had heard in the old barn. A man with red hair and wearing a blue coat walked forward. It was Garry Stone. He was holding a big black dog on a rope.

'You aren't going anywhere,' said Stone. 'Start walking back to the house.'

The three young people turned. Maxim whispered, 'Nick, I'll run towards the house. You and Maria go to the car. He can't go after all of us.'

'Okay,' said Nick.

'No,' said Maria. 'I'm not leaving you.'

'You *have to*,' said Maxim. 'Nick will help you.'

Nick whispered to Maria, 'Get ready to run.' Then he suddenly turned and ran straight at Stone. Stone let go of the rope and fell back onto the ground. The dog's teeth tore Nick's jacket as Nick jumped out of its way.

Maxim began to run towards the house and shouted, 'After me, dog!'

The dog began to run after Maxim. Nick took Maria's hand and shouted, 'Come on!' They turned to run to the gate and saw Valda Stone standing next to it. 'Get out of our way!' shouted Nick, and he ran straight at the woman. She fell back onto the ground. Nick pushed and pulled at the gate but it was locked. 'Okay, we'll have to go over it,' Nick said. 'Quickly!' He and Maria climbed over the gate and then Nick shouted, 'Into the car!'

Valda Stone was getting to her feet and shouting, 'Stop! Bring her back!' as Nick started the engine and drove away.

'The dog will kill Max,' cried Maria.

'No, it won't,' said Nick. 'He'll be okay. But we need help. We have to go to the police.'

Nick drove fast. He was sure Stone would soon come

looking for them. He decided to drive towards a road with more traffic on it. He wanted to make it difficult for Stone to find them. He kept looking in the mirror to see what was coming behind.

After a while he was sure a vehicle was following them, but it wasn't a van. It was a car. It began to flash its headlights at him. 'What do they want?' Nick said. He checked his own lights. They were on. But the car behind him kept flashing its lights.

Then the car moved out to pass Nick's car. 'Okay, okay, you can pass,' he said.

As the other car moved alongside Nick's, he looked across at it. There were three men in it – none of them was Stone. But one of them was making a sign with his hands to say 'Stop'.

'I don't know what they want, but I'll stop,' said Nick.

'No,' cried Maria.

'It's okay,' said Nick. 'It isn't the people from the house.'

He pulled the car over to the side of the road. The other car pulled over in front of him. Two men got out and walked towards Nick's car. They were wearing jeans and jackets.

'Keep your door locked,' said Nick to Maria.

One of the men knocked on Nick's window and said, 'Police. Open your window, please.'

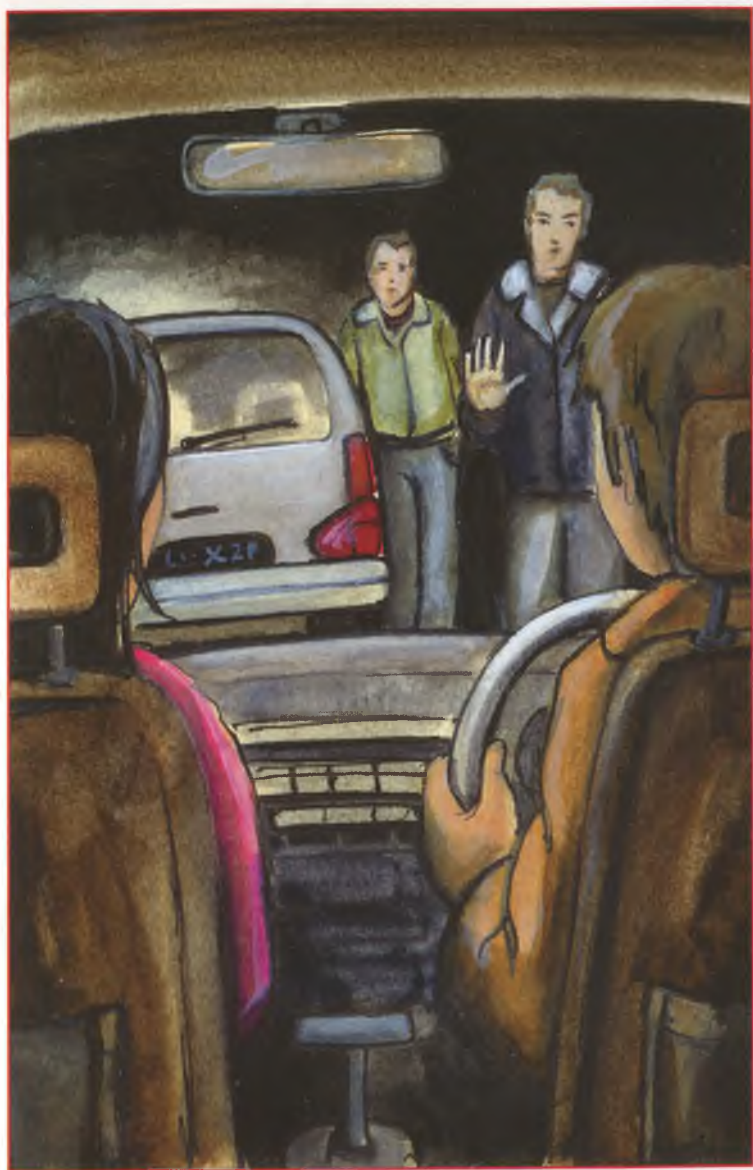
Nick opened his window a little way and said, 'How do I know you're police? You don't look like police. You're not in a police car.'

The man showed him a card. Nick read, 'Detective Inspector Watkins.'

'I'm Inspector Watkins and this is Sergeant Dan Hollis.'

Sergeant Hollis smiled at Nick and Maria and said, 'Good evening.'

'We need to talk,' said Inspector Watkins. 'Can you step out of the car and get in the back seat, please? Sergeant Hollis will drive.'



Nick and Maria got into the back. Inspector Watkins sat in the passenger seat in the front. Sergeant Hollis got into the driver's seat and flashed the headlights at the car in front. The front car drove off and Sergeant Hollis started Nick's car and followed.

'What's this about?' asked Nick.

'We've been following you, lad,' said the inspector. 'The local police told us you'd helped them. They didn't believe Mason's story. We've been watching the Stones and Mr Mason. We want to catch them bringing in some illegal immigrants.'

Nick told the police officers what he had heard in the old barn – that Stone was bringing more illegal immigrants from France.

'That's good. You'd make a good detective, Nick,' said Inspector Watkins. 'We'll be ready for them now.'

Sergeant Hollis said, 'I think we're being followed, sir. There's a van coming after us fast.'

Inspector Watkins said to Nick and Maria, 'Get on the floor and stay there.' They got onto the floor and the inspector took off his jacket and threw it on top of them. 'If it's Stone, he'll have a quick look in here as he passes. When he sees adults in the car he'll keep going.'

Sergeant Hollis slowed the car to let the van pass. On the floor, Nick heard the van come alongside them for a minute.

'That's him. Stay down, you two,' said Inspector Watkins.

Then the van went faster and passed their car. After a minute the inspector said, 'Right, he's gone. You can sit up now. Well done.'

They drove to Greenfields Farm and stopped in the yard. Lights went on inside, and then Mr Bennett opened the front door in his nightclothes. He was surprised to see the two cars there. 'What's happening?' he asked.

Inspector Watkins explained that he and Sergeant Hollis were police officers. 'Can we come in?' he asked.

Mrs Bennett showed them into the kitchen. Zip was still there, and he jumped up when he saw Nick.

Maria said, 'You have a dog?'

'Zip won't hurt you, Maria.' Nick took Maria over to the dog. Zip put his paw out. 'Take his paw,' said Nick. Maria took the dog's paw and smiled for the first time since Nick had met her.

'He's a nice dog,' said Maria.

Everyone sat down. Inspector Watkins told them the whole story.

Mrs Bennett said, 'So Nick was right.'

The inspector said, 'He was. You should be proud of him.'

Mr Bennett stared at his hands. Then he said, 'Why did you leave the lad – Maxim – there?'

Inspector Watkins said, 'We had no choice. We couldn't let the Stones know the police knew about them. We must catch them smuggling people into England.'

Maria cried quietly. Mrs Bennett put her arm around her. 'Shh,' she said. 'You need something to eat and a good night's sleep.' She made Maria a drink of hot chocolate. The girl was asleep at the table before she finished the drink. Mr Bennett picked her up and carried her upstairs. He was back in a few minutes. Mr Bennett looked angry.

Mrs Bennett said, 'Poor little thing. She's so thin. Did you see the marks on her arm?'

'And on her legs,' said Mr Bennett.

'I'll make sure we get Valda Stone,' said Inspector Watkins.

'What will happen to Maxim and Maria?' said Nick. 'They won't be sent back to Moldova, will they? Their Uncle Ivan will find them there.'

'That isn't going to happen,' said the inspector.

'What can we do to help?' said Mr Bennett.

Nick glanced at his father. *Maybe he's going to do what's right after all*, he thought.

'Is there anything you can tell us, Mr Bennett?' asked the inspector.

'I've agreed to lease some fields to Fred Mason,' said Mr Bennett. 'He's going to put in some crops. And he's going to put workers into caravans on the farm here.'

'Excuse me, I just need to talk to Sergeant Hollis for a minute,' said Inspector Watkins. The two police officers talked quietly for a while, and then Inspector Watkins asked Mr Bennett, 'Can you get Mason to come here tomorrow? We'd like you to try and get him to tell you that he's using illegal immigrants on his farm. We'd like to record your conversation.'

Mr Bennett looked down and said sadly, 'Fred and I went to the same school. We've been friends for years.'

Mrs Bennett said, 'You have to help the police, dear. He was willing to give a child to that Stone woman. I don't know how he could do that when he has daughters of his own.'

Nick was proud of his mother. He hoped he could be proud of his father too. Everyone in the room looked at Mr Bennett.

He looked at his wife and he looked at Nick. Finally he turned to the inspector and said, 'I'll do it.'

Caught in the net

Nick woke late the next morning and went downstairs to find Maria in the kitchen with his mother. Maria was eating breakfast and Zip was sitting at her feet. The dog was looking hopeful.

'It's her second breakfast. She was so hungry,' said Mrs Bennett. 'That woman only gave her bread and jam to eat.'

Nick sat down with Maria. His mother said, 'Have a cup of tea while I cook your breakfast, Nick.'

'Where's Dad?' Nick asked.

'He's over in the barn with the police,' said Mrs Bennett. 'They're going to get Dad to talk to Fred over there. And Inspector Watkins is going to hide behind the hay so he can listen.'

Nick thought it was very exciting until Maria said, 'Do you think Max is okay?'

'Don't worry. There are police watching the Stones' house,' he said. 'And if the Stones have Max, they've no reason to hurt him. They'll think that keeping him will stop you from going to the police.'

'Nick's right,' said his mother. 'Come on, Maria, let's get you into the bath and then into some clean clothes.'

Nick went out to the barn with Zip. His father was by himself and was saying, 'Testing, testing...'

'Where's Inspector Watkins?' Nick asked.

'Here I am.' The inspector came out from behind a pile of hay. 'It's good, Rod,' he said to Nick's father. 'I can hear you clearly.'

Mr Bennett said, 'I'll call Fred now.'

After his father had gone Nick said, 'Can I hide behind the hay too, Inspector?'

'I don't know about that, Nick.'

'Please,' said Nick. 'I'll be very quiet.'

'Yes, I'm sure you will,' said Inspector Watkins, 'Okay, Nick. But I think we'll leave the dog in the house!'

Fred Mason came to Greenfields Farm at three in the afternoon. Maria was in Nick's room with Zip. Mrs Bennett stayed upstairs too. Nick and Inspector Watkins were hiding behind the hay pile. Mr Bennett was cleaning the milking machines.

Mr Mason came in. 'Hello, Rod. I'm glad I don't have to do that these days,' he laughed.

'Hello, Fred,' said Mr Bennett. 'I'll be finished in a minute.'

The two men talked about farming for a few minutes and then Mr Bennett said, 'I want you to tell me more about things on Bluebell Farm, Fred.'

'What things, Rod?'

'Are your workers really legal?'

'I told you before that they all had papers. Why?'

Mr Bennett said, 'Well, Fred, you seem to be making a lot of money these days.'

Mr Mason was quiet for a while, and then he said, 'We've been friends for years, Rod.'

'Yes, we have.'

'And now we're going into business together.'

'Yes.'

'So I'll tell you what happens. But you mustn't ever tell anyone.'

'I won't.'

Dad doesn't have to, thought Nick. You're telling the police yourself!

Mr Mason told Nick's father all about Stone. 'He gets false papers for the workers. The papers look okay so no one will ever know we're using illegal immigrants. And those people are happy just to be in this country. I feed them, but that's all.'

They aren't going to cause problems by asking for money. Who are they going to tell?'

Mr Bennett said, 'All right, Fred. You can use the fields and put your people on my farm. But that's all. I don't want to get mixed up in anything else.'

Mr Mason said, 'Maybe. You'll see how easy it is and how much money you can make.'

'Well, I wouldn't say no to more money,' said Mr Bennett, and both men laughed.

Mr Mason left soon after and Nick and Inspector Watkins came out from behind the hay. Inspector Watkins was happy. 'You did well, Rod. We'll catch Mason and Stone on the beach tonight. This recording will be a big help to us.'

More police arrived in the evening. They found places to hide near the beach. When it was dark the police officers got ready. Nick and his father were allowed to go to the top of the cliff to watch. Zip had to stay home with Maria and Mrs Bennett.

'Find Maxim for me,' said Maria as Nick and his father left the house.

'I'll do my best,' said Nick.

It was a cold, cloudy night. It began to rain. Nick and his father sat behind a bush on the top of the cliff.

Mr Bennett said, 'It's time I said sorry, lad.'

Nick said, 'It's okay, Dad. I know it was difficult to believe Mr Mason was a people smuggler.'

His father said, 'I don't mean sorry about that. I *am* sorry about that, but I'm really sorry that I tried to make you leave school. You don't want to be a farmer, do you?'

Nick was glad it was so dark. He didn't want to see his father's face. 'No, I don't. I'm sorry too, Dad.'

Just then they heard a car engine. They looked down at the beach. They saw headlights. A car was driving onto the sand.

'It's Fred,' said Mr Bennett.

A few minutes later they saw more headlights.

They heard car doors opening and closing. They could hear voices in the wind, but not what they were saying.

Mr Bennett said, 'Let's go closer. They won't see us.'

They carefully walked down the cliff path until they were close to the beach. They could hear much better, and there were headlights on now. A group of men was standing and looking out to sea. Nick whispered into his father's ear, 'Do you see that one with his arm in a plaster cast? That's Maxim.'

'He's okay then,' said Mr Bennett. 'Good.'

'The man in the blue coat is Stone,' Nick continued.

They watched while the men on the beach got into Mr Mason's boat. The boat's engine started and it moved away from the shore.

There was someone else left on the beach with Stone when the boat had left. The two of them were smoking.

'I think Valda Stone's here too,' said Nick.

A short while later lights flashed out to sea and the Stones flashed lights from the beach. The Stones had smoked several more cigarettes before the Bennetts heard Mr Mason's boat coming back to shore. The boat came in to the beach and the engine stopped. The Stones had their headlights shining on the water. People jumped out of the boat and came up onto the beach.

Nick held his breath. When would the police appear?

Suddenly there were lights everywhere. The beach was lit brightly and a voice shouted, 'Police! Stop!' Everyone stopped for a few moments. Then someone ran past Nick. 'Dad, that's Maria,' Nick said. He stood up as Zip ran past after Maria. 'Zip!' Nick shouted. 'Come back!'

Zip didn't stop. Maria ran across the sand towards Valda Stone. 'You bad woman!' the girl shouted. 'Where is my brother?' She jumped at Valda Stone.

The woman pushed Maria onto the sand. She pulled her up

again and held her in front of her. 'Don't come near me,' she called to the police who were running towards her. 'Or I'll hurt the girl.'

Nick shouted, 'Zip! Get her!'

Zip barked loudly. Valda shouted, 'Go away, dog!' but Zip jumped right at her. The woman screamed and let Maria go. Maria fell, and Nick ran forward and picked her up from the sand. Valda Stone was lying on the sand now and Zip was standing over her. A police officer arrested the woman and took her away.

People were running all over the beach. Some began to swim out to sea. But there were more police than immigrants, and after a few minutes all of the immigrants had been caught.

Nick's father walked over to Nick, Maria and Zip. 'Maria, we thought you were at home with Nick's mother,' he said.

Maria said, 'I'm sorry. She was watching television. Then I saw she was having a little sleep. So I took Zip for a walk.'

Mr Bennett smiled. 'And you just decided to walk to the beach?'

'Yes,' said Maria.

Nick saw Inspector Watkins and called, 'Did you catch Mr Mason?'

'Yes, he didn't fight at all. Last time I saw him he was saying, "Jackie will kill me".'

Mr Bennett said, 'And Stone? Did you get him?'

'Yes, we got him,' replied Inspector Watkins. 'He'll go to prison for a long time.'

That night the fishing boat with Maxim and the other men was stopped out at sea. The workers were taken to hospital. Late in the morning Inspector Watkins brought Maxim back to Greenfields Farm.

'Max!' Maria shouted and threw her arms around her brother.



'Mr and Mrs Bennett, can I have a word with you?' said Inspector Watkins.

'Yes, of course,' said Mr Bennett.

While the adults talked, Nick took Maxim and Maria for a walk around Greenfields Farm.

'This is a beautiful place,' said Maxim. 'And your parents are good people.'

'Yes,' said Nick. 'Yes, they are.'

The inspector stayed for lunch. Mrs Bennett cooked a meal for everyone. Zip was very happy. Now he had more people to give him little bits of meat. Afterwards they all sat in front of the fire and drank tea.

'What is going to happen to Maria and Maxim now?' Nick asked.

Inspector Watkins said, 'I've been on the phone to someone from the government, and after what happened to Maria and Maxim in Moldova, they have a very good chance of staying here in England.'

'That's great,' said Nick. 'But where are they going to live?'

Then Mr Bennett said, 'Your mother and I have been talking, Nick. We've discussed this with the inspector and we've also spoken to some people from the government. We'd like to offer Maria and Maxim a home here with us.'

Nick could hardly believe what he was hearing. Maria and Maxim looked surprised too.

'Maria can go to school with you, Nick,' his father continued. 'And if Maxim wants to work on the farm, he'd be very welcome.'

Maxim said, 'Is this okay with you, Nick?'

Zip was sitting with his head on Maria's knee. Nick looked at his parents. He thought, *I always wanted brothers and sisters.* He smiled and said, 'It's okay with me. It's great!'

Maxim said to Maria, 'Do you remember when we were in that lorry for all that time?'

'Yes,' she said. 'It was terrible.'

'I thought we were on the road to nowhere,' he said. 'But you saved us, Nick.'

'It wasn't the road to nowhere,' said Nick. 'You were really on the road to Greenfields Farm.'

Activities

Chapters 1 and 2

Before you read

A. Look at the picture on page 7 and circle the correct answers.

1. Where is this?
a. on a farm b. in a city c. in a forest
2. What is the young man wearing on his feet?
a. shoes b. Wellington boots c. slippers

B. Find these words in your dictionary. Use them in the sentences.

smuggle newsreader dairy farmer barn

1. The _____ sent all the milk to the cheese factory.
2. The animals in the _____ were warm and dry.
3. The _____ read out the names of the injured people.
4. People _____ cigarettes and alcohol across the border.

C. Listen to Track 3 on CD1 and answer these questions.

1. How many languages could Maxim speak?
a. three b. four
2. What were the Moldovan people hiding in?
a. a lorry b. a ferry
3. Who were checking every lorry?
a. the police b. Chinese people

After you read

COMPREHENSION

A. Circle the correct answers.

1. Where did Nick want to go for two weeks with his class?
a. China b. France c. Moldova
2. What was the name of Nick's dog?
a. Zip b. Flo c. Jake
3. Nick saw a boat at night. What was the boat full of?
a. fish b. nets c. people
4. Who took the boat out to sea again?
a. the van driver b. Mr Mason c. Nick

B. Circle T for true or F for false for these sentences.

1. The newsreader said the police had arrested sixteen people. T / F
2. There was a lot of money in dairy farming. T / F
3. Maxim was the first Moldovan to get off the boat. T / F
4. Daffodils are fish. T / F

C. Complete these sentences.

1. Nick's father liked to listen to the radio _____.
2. Maria and Maxim arrived on a fishing _____.
3. In the van, Maria held Maxim's _____.
4. Nick fixed the milking machines to the _____.

D. Write short answers to these questions.

1. What did Nick drop to his dog under the dinner table?

2. Who drove a car onto the beach at night?

3. What was the name of the man who said he was the boss?

4. Who did Nick think might be a people smuggler?

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

A. Match each word with its opposite from Chapters 1 and 2.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. home | a. dead |
| 2. less | b. started |
| 3. alive | c. abroad |
| 4. stopped | d. more |

B. Use these letters to make words from Chapters 1 and 2.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. atme: m _____ | 3. klmi: m _____ |
| 2. tterbu: b _____ | 4. eta: t _____ |

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think that Nick is right about the people smuggling? Why or why not?

Chapters 3 and 4

Before you read

A. Look at the picture on page 16 and circle the correct answers.

1. Where is this?
a. at a beach b. in a town c. on a farm
2. Who is looking out of an upstairs window?
a. a man b. a police officer c. a girl

B. Find these words in your dictionary. Use them in the sentences.

travel agency ambulance university central heating

1. Neil hoped to study dentistry at _____.
2. Our house is very cold. The _____ isn't working.
3. Joan went to the _____ to book a holiday in Canada.
4. Oh no! Peter's fallen off the roof! Call an _____!

C. Listen to Track 4 on CD1 and answer these questions.

1. Where was the voice shouting angrily?
a. upstairs b. downstairs
2. What had Nick been looking at?
a. buses b. brochures
3. What colour was the paper in the brochure that Nick held out to the woman?
a. yellow b. red

After you read

COMPREHENSION

A. Circle the correct answers.

1. What day was it when Nick went into the travel agency?
a. Monday b. Tuesday c. Wednesday
2. What was the name of the girl at the bus stop who Nick called out to?
a. Valda b. Maria c. Jenna
3. What did Fred Mason grow in the spring?
a. vegetables b. daffodils c. apples
4. What was the one word Maxim said to Nick after asking for help to find his sister?
a. 'sky' b. 'sea' c. 'stone'

B. Circle T for true or F for false for these sentences.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. The brochures in the travel agency looked new. | T / F |
| 2. Mrs Bennett earned some money selling eggs. | T / F |
| 3. Fred Mason's daughters were older than Nick. | T / F |
| 4. Nick had a mobile phone. | T / F |

C. Complete these sentences.

1. Nick didn't want to be a farmer. He wanted to study at university, get a good job and live in the middle of _____.
2. Maxim started picking daffodils early every _____.
3. On Fred Mason's farm, Nick saw caravans next to the old _____.
4. The ambulance officers saw blood in the _____.

D. Write short answers to these questions.

1. What was the name of the travel agency?

2. What did Maxim and the other men put into packets for supermarkets?

3. What was Fred Mason's farm called?

4. Who called the ambulance?

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

A. Match the words that go together to make compound words from Chapters 3 and 4.

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. week | a. light |
| 2. with | b. end |
| 3. home | c. out |
| 4. moon | d. work |

B. Write the missing vowels to make words from Chapters 3 and 4.

- | | |
|----------|----------------------|
| 1. v _ n | 3. _ mb _ l _ nc _ |
| 2. b _ s | 4. p _ l _ c _ c _ r |

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think Maxim and Maria will see each other again one day?
How could this happen?

Chapters 5 and 6

Before you read

A. Look at the picture on page 31 and circle the correct answers.

1. What has hit the parking sign?
a. a car b. a bus c. a lorry
2. Who is standing beside the girl in the pink dress?
a. Nick b. Mr Stone c. Mr Mason

B. Find these words in your dictionary. Use them in the sentences.

coward lease whispered adult

1. 'The baby's asleep. Don't make any noise,' _____ Sue.
2. The soldier who refused to fight was called a _____.
3. To go on this ride, children must be with an _____.
4. Bill wanted to _____ a shop and open his own café.

C. Listen to Track 5 on CD1 and answer these questions.

1. What did they take off before they went inside?
a. their coats b. their boots
2. What was Mr Mason's first name?
a. Fred b. Frank
3. Where did the farmers sit down?
a. at the kitchen table b. on the sofa

After you read

COMPREHENSION

A. Circle the correct answers.

1. Who was Jackie?
a. Mrs Bennett b. Mrs Mason c. Mrs Stone
2. What was the name of Mr Stone's wife?
a. Jackie b. Valda c. Maria
3. How far was the village of Marden from Nick's house?
a. about three miles b. about five miles c. about ten miles
4. What did Nick say to Mrs Stone when she answered the phone?
a. 'Sorry, wrong number.' b. 'Hello.' c. 'Nick speaking.'

B. Circle T for true or F for false for these sentences.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Mr Mason said all their workers had papers. | T / F |
| 2. Maria liked Mrs Stone. | T / F |
| 3. Zip went up the ladder to the roof. | T / F |
| 4. Nick had a driving licence. | T / F |

C. Complete these sentences.

1. The police had woken the Masons up in the middle of the _____.
2. Mr Mason said none of his workers were illegal _____.
3. When Nick found him in the barn, Maxim's arm was in a plaster _____.
4. Nick got into the car and started the _____.

D. Write short answers to these questions.

1. Who called Mr Bennett a coward?

2. Where and when did Maria read books?

3. What did Maria climb down to escape from the travel agency?

4. Which country did Maxim's Uncle Ivan come from?

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

A. Write the correct prepositions in the spaces.

by around over in front of

1. Mason marched _____ to Nick.
2. Nick had found a van _____ the road.
3. The girl ran across the road _____ the bus.
4. Nick put his arm _____ Maria.

B. Write the missing vowels to make words from Chapters 5 and 6.

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. sc _ r _ d | 3. _ nh _ ppy |
| 2. _ ps _ t | 4. w _ rr _ _ d |

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think Nick should be helping Maxim and Maria? Why or why not?

Chapters 7 and 8

Before you read

A. Look at the picture on page 43 and circle the correct answers.

1. When is this?
a. in the morning b. in the afternoon c. at night
2. How many men are standing in front of the car?
a. two b. three c. four

B. Find these words in your dictionary. Use them in the sentences.

record park run away paw

1. The unhappy boy decided to _____ from home.
2. The singer was asked to _____ his best songs for a CD.
3. The lion had a sore _____ and couldn't walk properly.
4. Mike looked for a place to _____ his car near the hotel.

C. Listen to Track 6 on CD1 and answer these questions.

1. When he found her, where did Maxim plan to go with Maria?
a. to Moldova b. to London
2. Why did Nick park the car facing away from the gate?
a. so they could get away quickly
b. because Maxim told him to
3. What did Nick and Maxim stop behind?
a. a bridge b. some bushes

After you read

COMPREHENSION

A. Circle the correct answers.

1. What colour was Mr Stone's hair?
a. red b. black c. grey
2. What did Mr Stone's dog tear?
a. Nick's trousers b. Nick's jacket c. Maxim's jacket
3. What had Mrs Stone fed Maria?
a. pie and vegetables b. bread and jam c. bits of meat
4. What was Mr Bennett cleaning when Mr Mason arrived?
a. the windows b. the car c. the milking machines

B. Circle T for true or F for false for these sentences.

1. Nick had driven at night before. T / F
2. The gate to Hadley Hall was locked when they arrived. T / F
3. Stone got false papers for the workers. T / F
4. On the beach, Zip helped Maria get away from Mrs Stone. T / F

C. Complete these sentences.

1. They saw Maria in the kitchen. She was washing _____.
2. Maria went back into the Stones' house to get her
_____.
3. Nick and the inspector hid behind a pile of _____.
4. It was a cold, cloudy night. It began to _____.

D. Write short answers to these questions.

1. What animals was Maria scared of?

2. Who got into the car with Nick when they got away from the Stones?

3. Who brought Maxim back to Greenfields Farm?

4. What meal did the inspector stay for?

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

A. Circle the correct verb forms in these sentences.

1. Nick **drove** / **drived** carefully.
2. Sergeant Hollis **slow** / **slowed** the car to let the van pass.
3. They **found** / **finded** places to hide near the beach.
4. They **heard** / **heard** car doors opening and closing.

B. Write the missing vowels to make words from Chapters 7 and 8.

1. c _ r _ f _ lly
2. s _ ftly
3. qu _ _ tly
4. f _ n _ lly

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think Maria and Maxim will be happy living with Nick's family? Why do you think this?

Road to Nowhere

Activities: Answer Key

Chapters 1 and 2

Before you read

- A. 1. a, 2. b B. 1. dairy farmer, 2. barn,
3. newsreader, 4. smuggle
C. 1. b, 2. a, 3. a

After you read

Comprehension

- A. 1. b, 2. a, 3. c, 4. b B. 1. T, 2. F,
3. F, 4. F C. 1. news, 2. boat, 3. hand,
4. cows D. 1. some meat, 2. Mr Mason,
3. Stone, 4. Mr Mason

Language activities

- A. 1. c, 2. d, 3. a, 4. b B. 1. meat,
2. butter, 3. milk, 4. tea

What do you think?

Students' own answers

Chapters 3 and 4

Before you read

- A. 1. b, 2. c B. 1. university,
2. central heating, 3. travel agency,
4. ambulance C. 1. a, 2. b, 3. a

After you read

Comprehension

- A. 1. a, 2. c, 3. b, 4. c B. 1. F, 2. T,
3. F, 4. F C. 1. London, 2. morning,
3. dairy, 4. van D. 1. Red Fox Travel,
2. chicken pieces, 3. Bluebell Farm,
4. Nick

Language activities

- A. 1. b, 2. c, 3. d, 4. a B. 1. van,
2. bus, 3. ambulance, 4. police car

What do you think?

Students' own answers

Chapters 5 and 6

Before you read

- A. 1. b, 2. a B. 1. whispered,
2. coward, 3. adult, 4. lease C. 1. b,
2. a, 3. a

After you read

Comprehension

- A. 1. b, 2. b, 3. c, 4. a B. 1. T, 2. F,
3. F, 4. F C. 1. night, 2. immigrants,
3. cast, 4. engine D. 1. Nick, 2. in bed
at night, 3. a drainpipe, 4. Russia

Language activities

- A. 1. over, 2. by, 3. in front of,
4. around B. 1. scared, 2. upset,
3. unhappy, 4. worried

What do you think?

Students' own answers

Chapters 7 and 8

Before you read

- A. 1. c, 2. a B. 1. run away, 2. record,
3. paw, 4. park C. 1. b, 2. a, 3. b

After you read

Comprehension

- A. 1. a, 2. b, 3. b, 4. c B. 1. F, 2. F,
3. T, 4. T C. 1. dishes, 2. photographs,
3. hay, 4. rain D. 1. dogs, 2. Maria,
3. Inspector Watkins, 4. lunch

Language activities

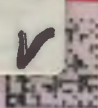
- A. 1. drove, 2. slowed, 3. found,
4. heard B. 1. carefully, 2. softly,
3. quietly, 4. finally

What do you think?

Students' own answers

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Each year near his family's farm one night, Nick
at bringing something unusual to shore –
s that they are illegal immigrants. When he
what's happening on a nearby farm, he
realises he was right. Soon Nick finds himself involved with a
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