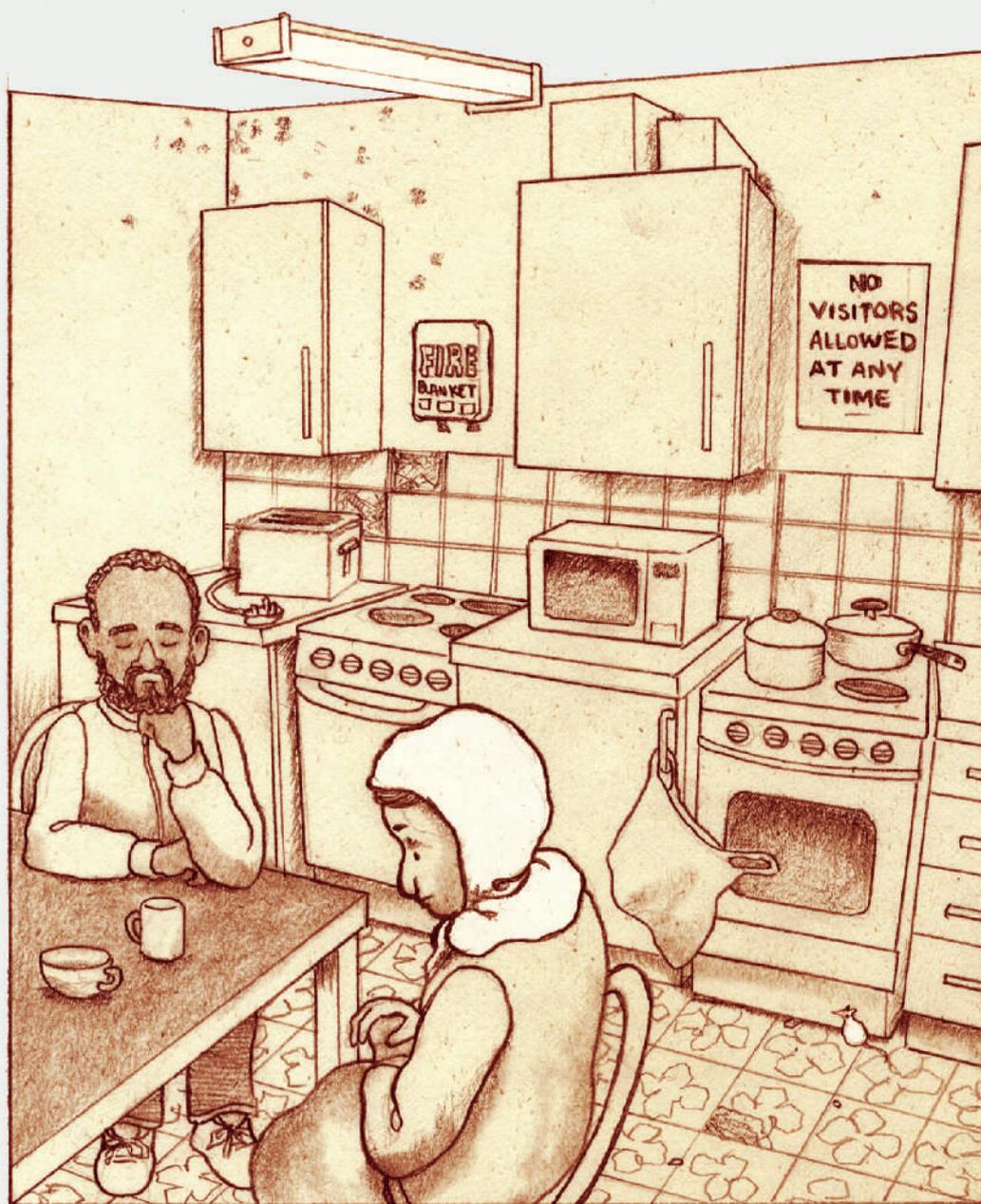


Echoes of Displacement

A collective story of growing older
& seeking sanctuary in Manchester



Researched by Tess Hartland
Illustrated by Lindsay Pollock

Written collaboratively alongside people
with lived experience of seeking sanctuary.



Echoes of Displacement is a collective story of growing older and seeking sanctuary in Manchester.

It is beautifully illustrated by Lindsay Pollock.

Co-produced with people living and ageing in Manchester, who have sought sanctuary in the UK, the comic is based on primary research conducted with men and women aged 50 and over. At some point in their lives, these individuals have fled from different countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

While all characters in the comic are fictionalised, the story reflects the shared experiences of people we spoke to, along with some direct, anonymised quotes.

We have experimented with different ways of communicating the subtleties of moving to a new country, which you can look out for. For example, language barriers (upside-down speech-bubbles) and coping with the weather (plastic bags over shoes)!

Our aim was to amplify the voices and identities of those who are often silenced; in this case, people who have experienced forced displacement and are now in mid- to later-life.

Through Echoes of Displacement we hope to raise awareness of the refugee experience, offering humanity and emotion to challenge the negative narratives that fill the media.

Acknowledgements:

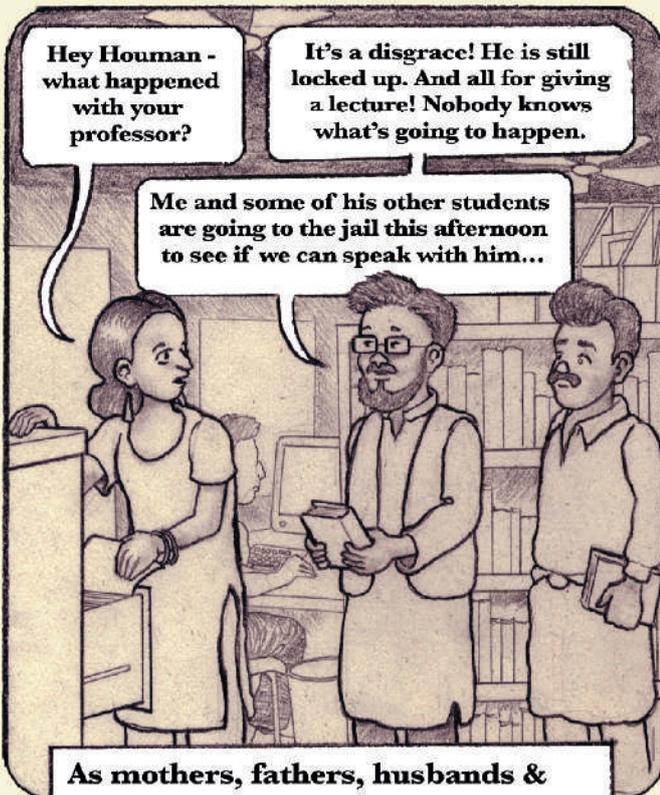
I would like to thank everyone who generously shared their memories and experiences with me – some shocking, some sad and others uplifting. I must also thank Manchester City of Sanctuary and RAPAR, particularly Liz and Alimamy, who continue to facilitate and support my research. Without you, this project would not have been possible.

A special thanks goes to my supervisors, Prof Tine Buffel, Prof Tanja Bastia and Dr Patty Doran, for their continued guidance and belief in my PhD research.

- Tess Hartland, 06/2023

****all names in this comic changed for anonymity.***

**No refugee or asylum seeker, is merely a refugee or asylum seeker.
Before fleeing calamity, everyone has a role, an identity, a whole life in motion.**

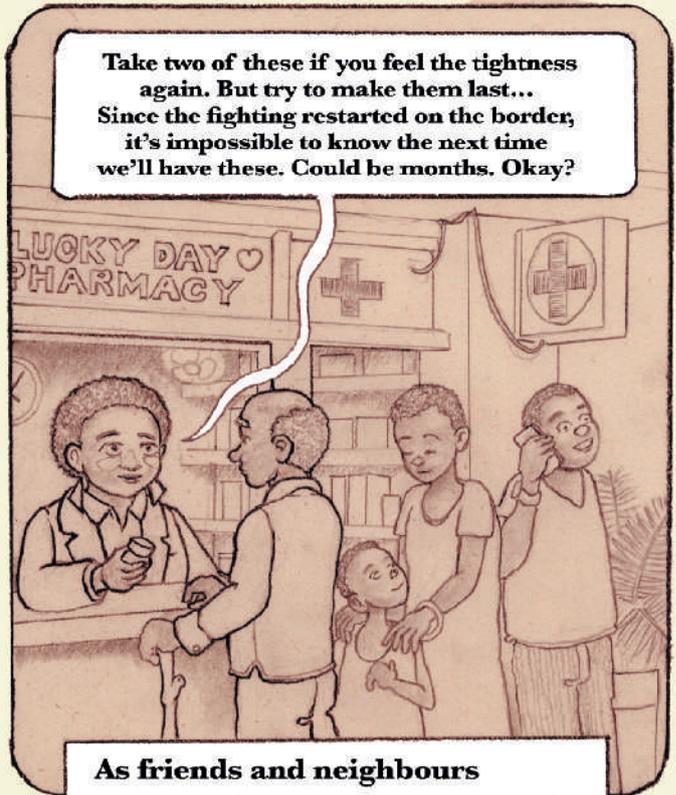


Hey Houman - what happened with your professor?

It's a disgrace! He is still locked up. And all for giving a lecture! Nobody knows what's going to happen.

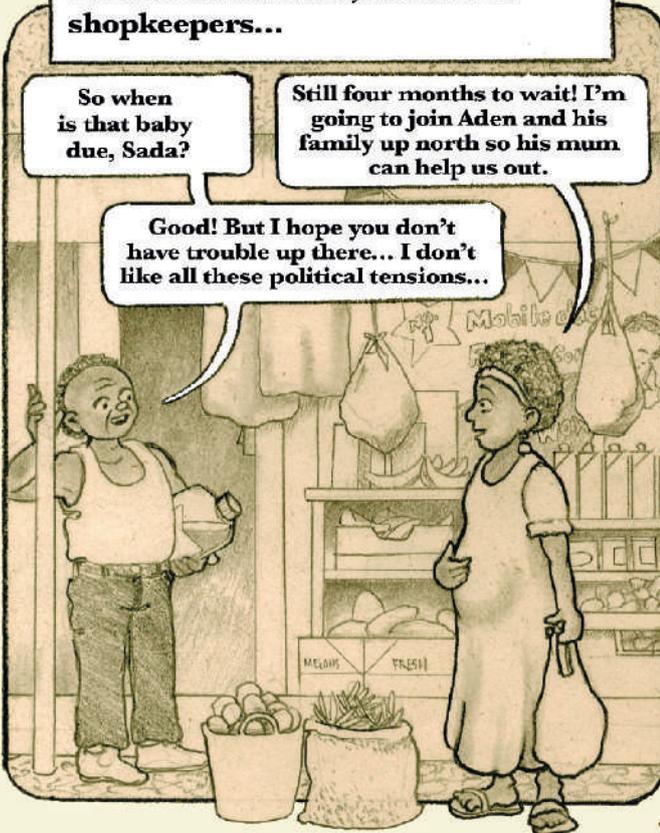
Me and some of his other students are going to the jail this afternoon to see if we can speak with him...

As mothers, fathers, husbands & wives... as teachers, doctors or shopkeepers...



Take two of these if you feel the tightness again. But try to make them last... Since the fighting restarted on the border, it's impossible to know the next time we'll have these. Could be months. Okay?

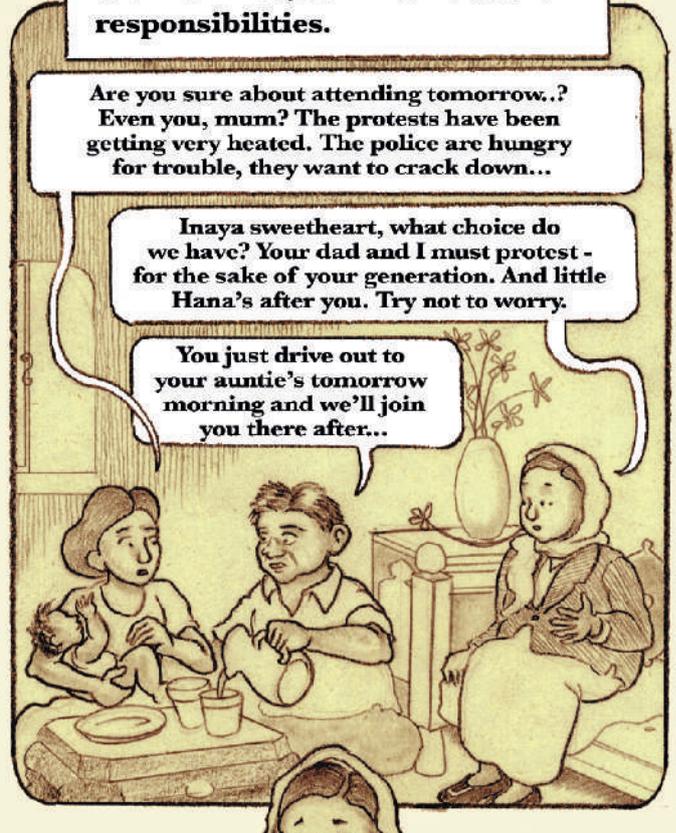
As friends and neighbours with families, communities and responsibilities.



So when is that baby due, Sada?

Still four months to wait! I'm going to join Aden and his family up north so his mum can help us out.

Good! But I hope you don't have trouble up there... I don't like all these political tensions...



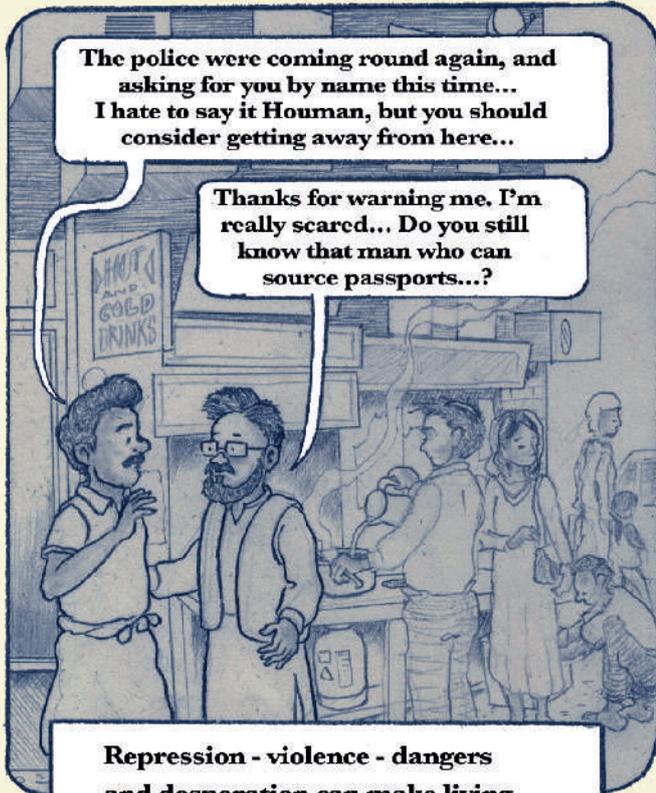
Are you sure about attending tomorrow..? Even you, mum? The protests have been getting very heated. The police are hungry for trouble, they want to crack down...

Inaya sweetheart, what choice do we have? Your dad and I must protest - for the sake of your generation. And little Hana's after you. Try not to worry.

You just drive out to your auntie's tomorrow morning and we'll join you there after...



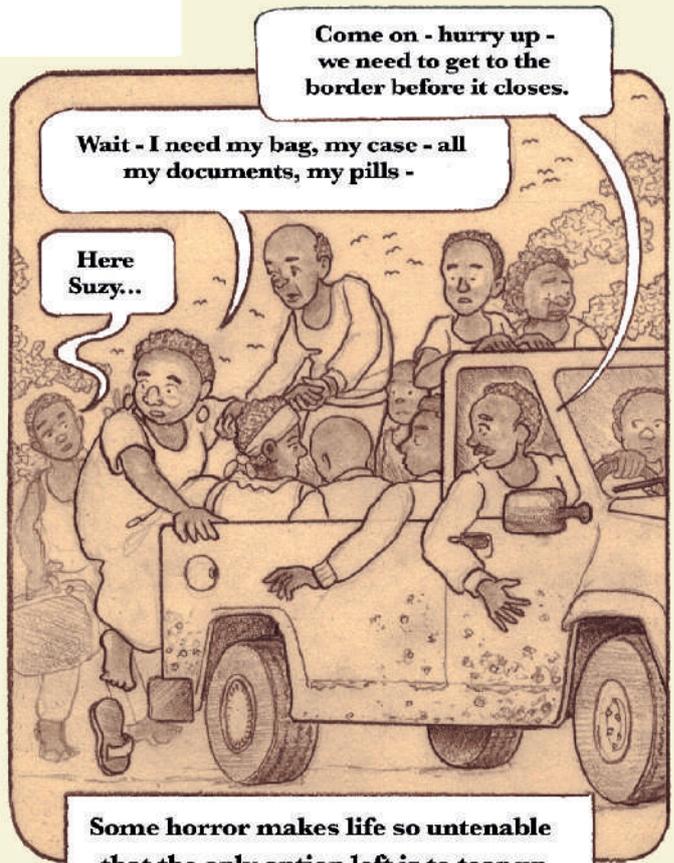
**Nobody wants to leave their life and loved ones behind.
But sometimes there's no choice.**



The police were coming round again, and asking for you by name this time... I hate to say it Houman, but you should consider getting away from here...

Thanks for warning me, I'm really scared... Do you still know that man who can source passports...?

Repression - violence - dangers and desperation can make living unbearable - the future impossible.

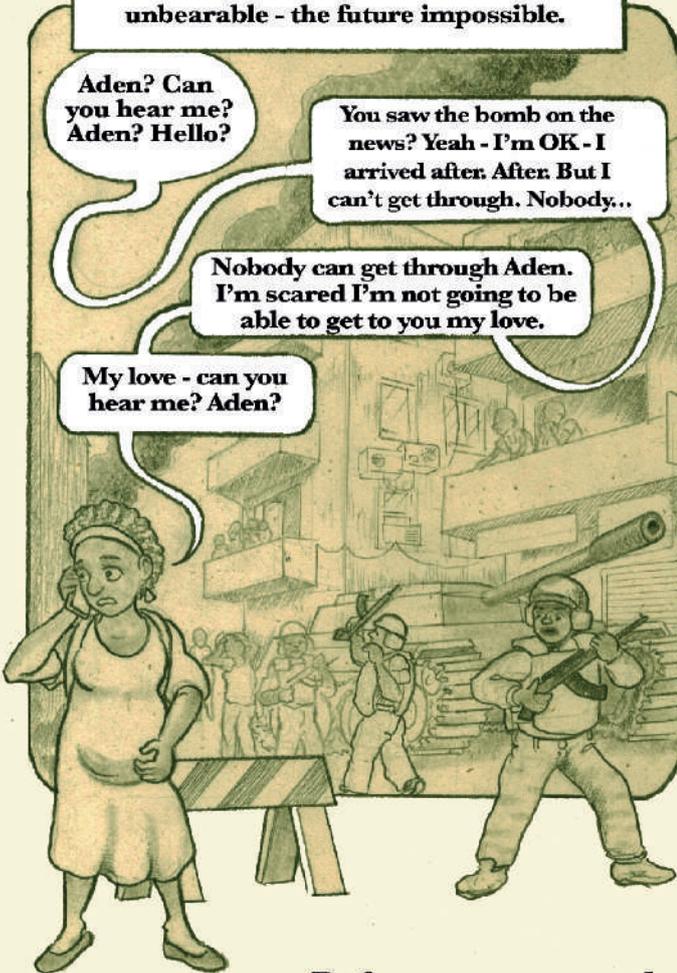


Come on - hurry up - we need to get to the border before it closes.

Wait - I need my bag, my case - all my documents, my pills -

Here Suzy...

Some horror makes life so untenable that the only option left is to tear up your own roots and flee.

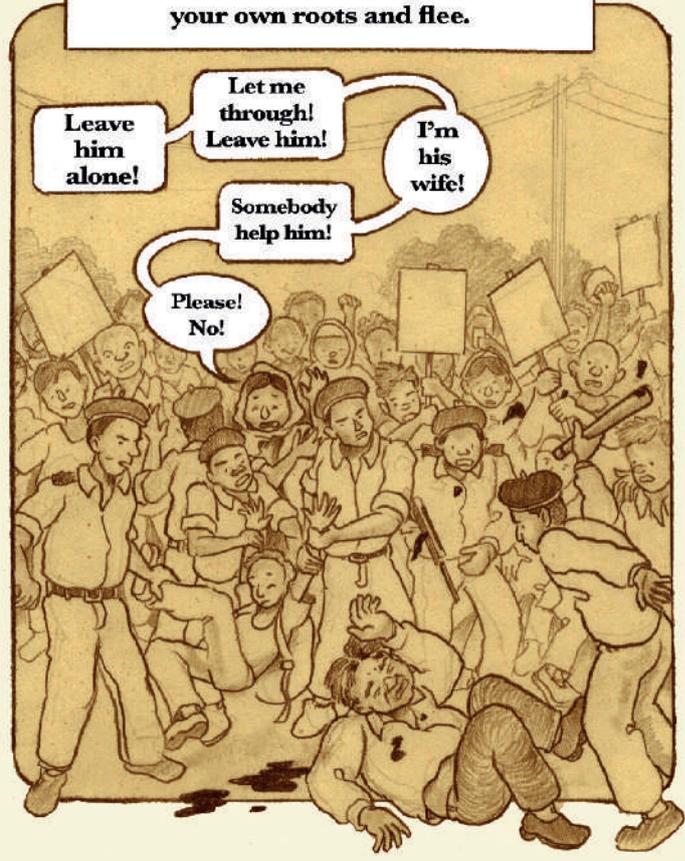


Aden? Can you hear me? Aden? Hello?

You saw the bomb on the news? Yeah - I'm OK - I arrived after. After. But I can't get through. Nobody...

Nobody can get through Aden. I'm scared I'm not going to be able to get to you my love.

My love - can you hear me? Aden?



Leave him alone!

Let me through! Leave him!

I'm his wife!

Somebody help him!

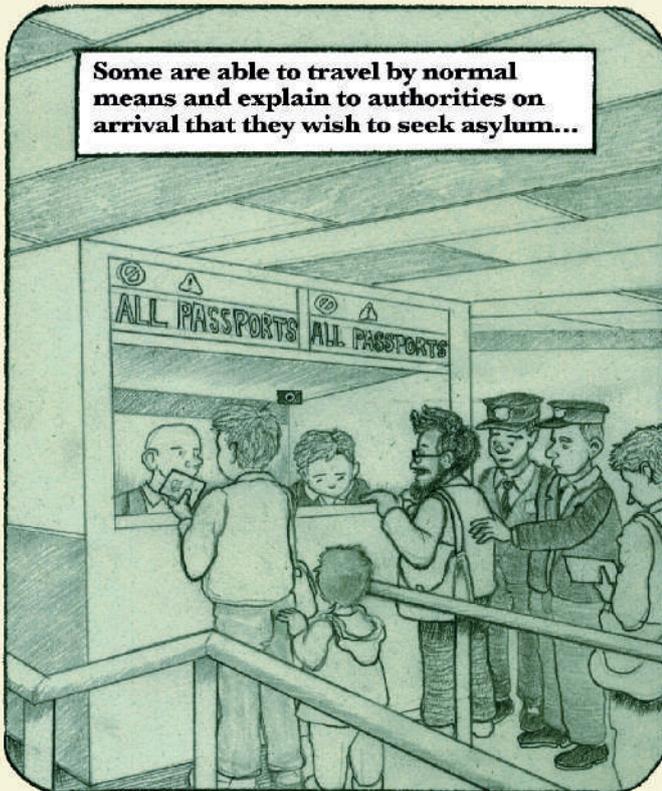
Please! No!

Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their country because of war, violence or persecution [1].

Escaping their own home can be hard.

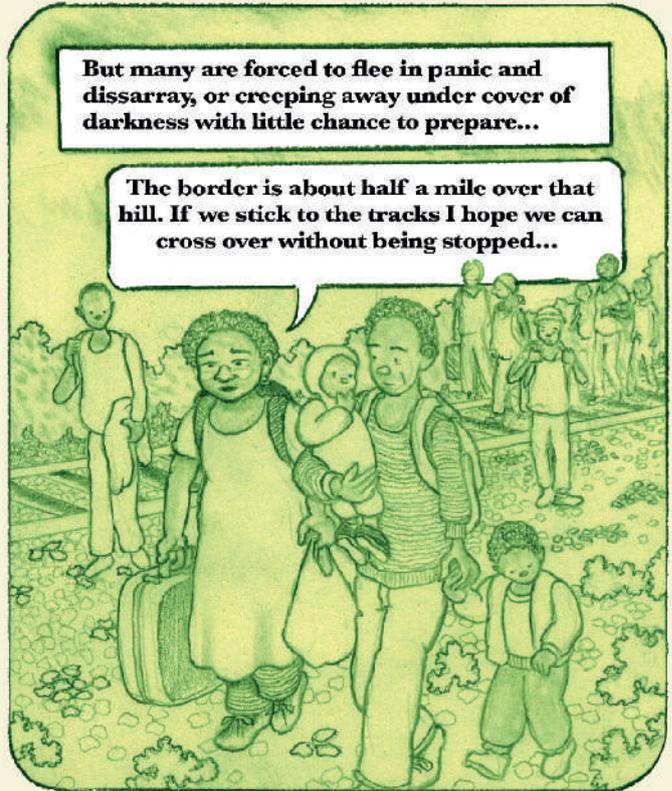
But finding a new home can be harder - much harder - sometimes impossible.

Some are able to travel by normal means and explain to authorities on arrival that they wish to seek asylum...



But many are forced to flee in panic and disarray, or creeping away under cover of darkness with little chance to prepare...

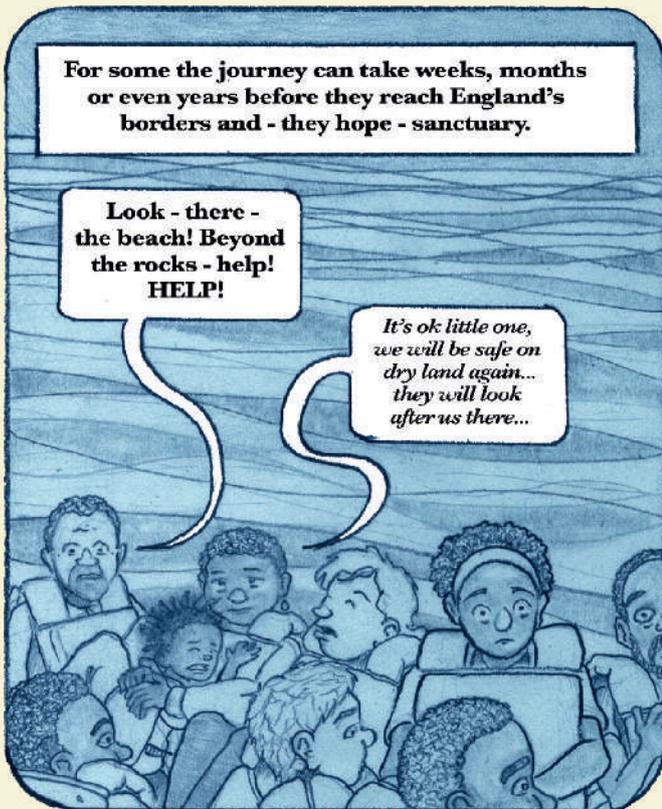
The border is about half a mile over that hill. If we stick to the tracks I hope we can cross over without being stopped...



For some the journey can take weeks, months or even years before they reach England's borders and - they hope - sanctuary.

Look - there - the beach! Beyond the rocks - help! HELP!

It's ok little one, we will be safe on dry land again... they will look after us there...



I'm so sorry Inaya. I never wanted to leave you. But I'm a danger to you and Hana if I stay... oh my daughter...

The English politicians supported our cause many times. I know they will help us... Hide here with auntie and uncle. Have faith. I will call for you from England. I love you...



This can be especially difficult for older generations, who may never have left their home country in their lives.

An asylum seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed [1].

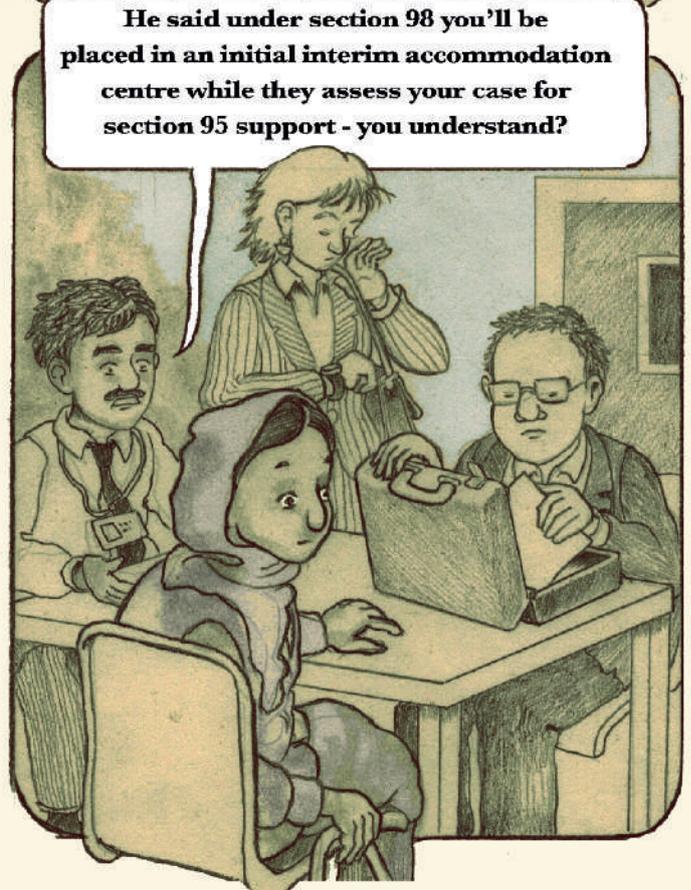
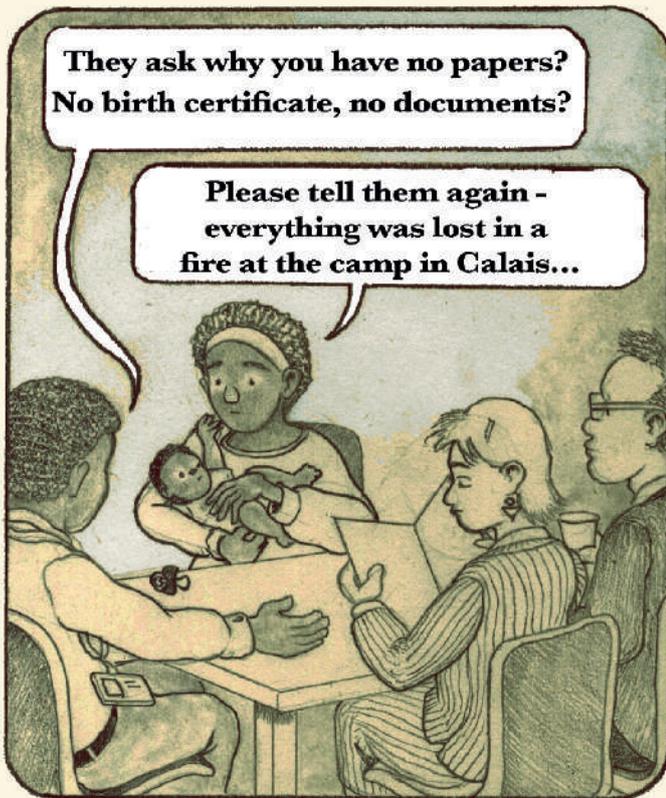
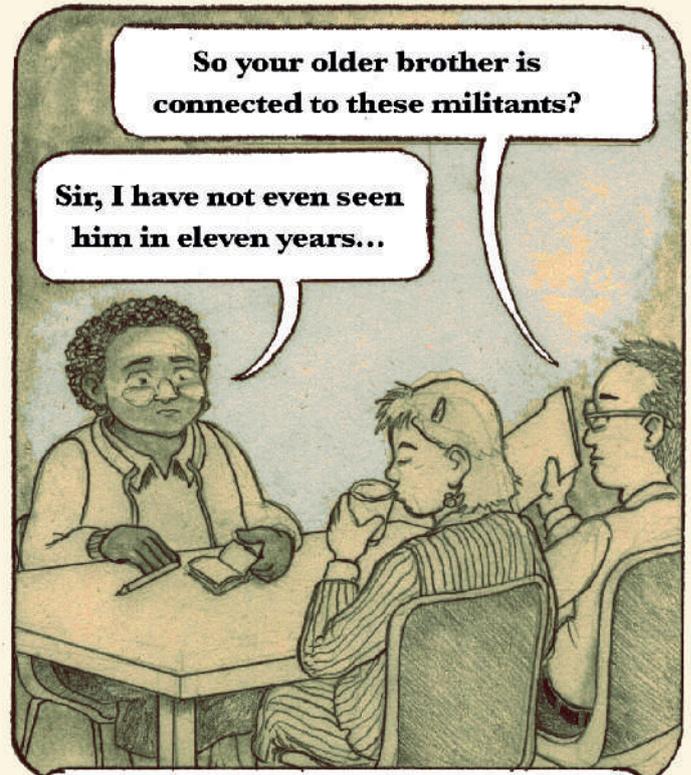
Over 70% of refugees live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin [2].

The UK is home to only 1% of refugees worldwide [3].

The top 5 nationalities for asylum applications in the UK in 2021 were: Albania, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria [4]



It's hard enough for a young person, to be a stranger in a strange land, facing hostile immigration officers.



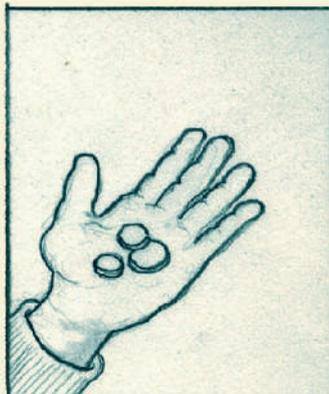
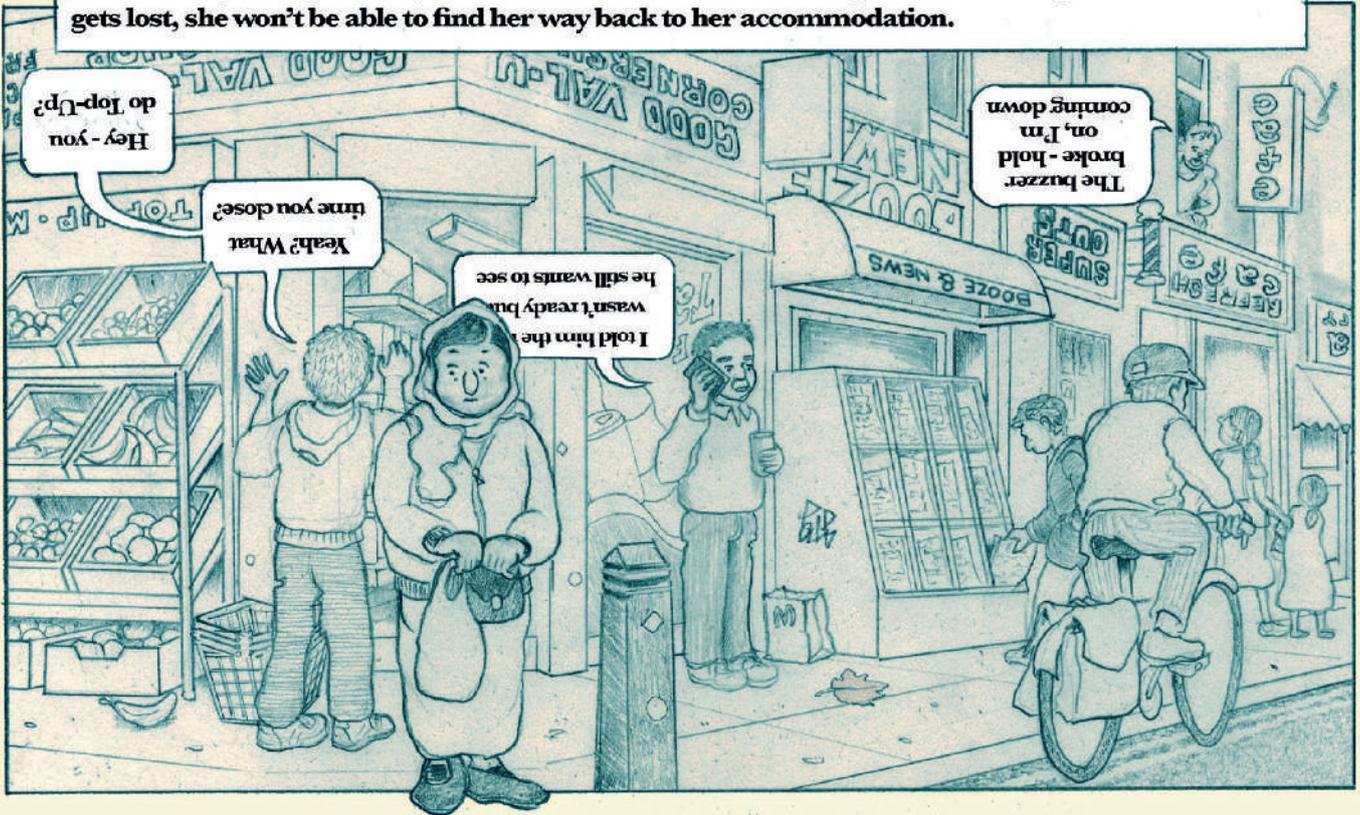
The asylum process is extremely complex. The interview with the Home Office is an important part of a person's application. They are asked in detail about the reason for seeking asylum. This is often long, traumatic and lacking in empathy.

"When I came to England, I was thinking maybe it will be easy to live...it's not easy. [the Home Office] told me 'you're a liar'. They don't believe. They needed proof, they needed evidence. Which I didn't have." (Imara*, 52)

"What will happen next, what will be the Home Office decision? It is like from river into the sea into more problems." (Afnan*, 54)

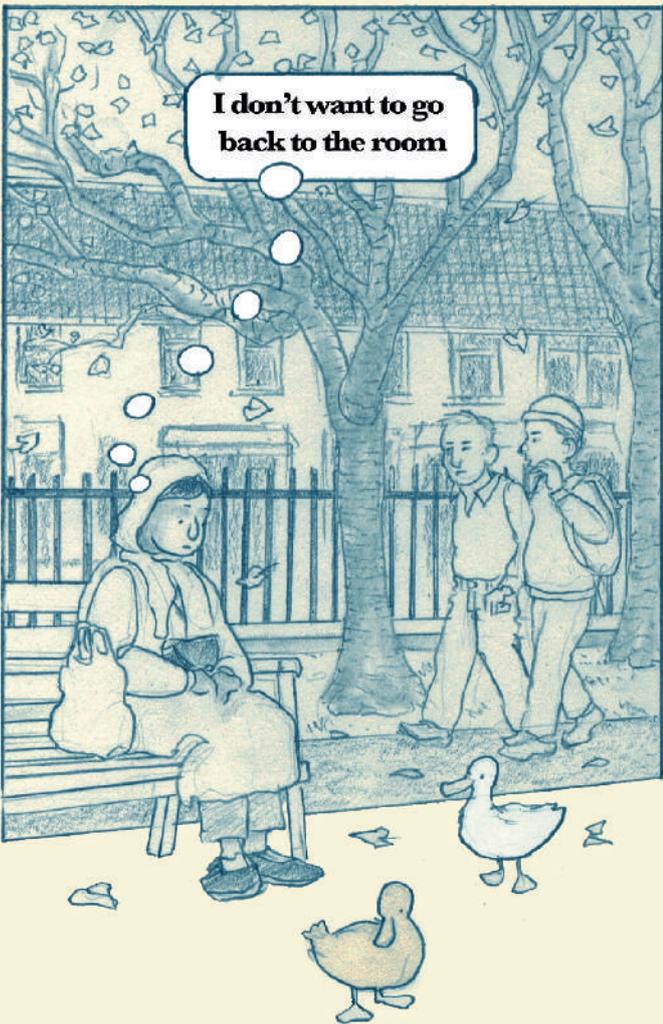
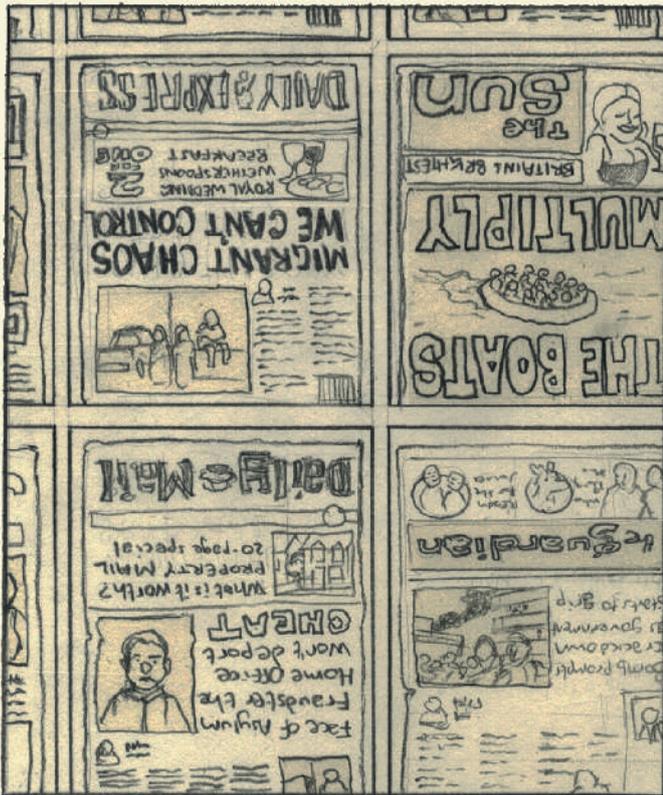
"They tell me I'm [a] criminal. And 'you are doing nothing for this country'". (Gloria*, 58)

After being transferred from temporary accommodation in London, 63-year-old Camelia has been in Manchester for three weeks. She doesn't speak English. She doesn't know anyone. She has not yet caught a bus, or walked further than the local high street - fearing that if she gets lost, she won't be able to find her way back to her accommodation.



Asylum seekers do not have the right to work in the UK. People seeking asylum are given £6.42 per day. This is to cover food, sanitation and clothing [6].

“When you spend money on food, you don't have anything left. Food is so expensive. I always cry as I don't know where to get help.” (Aleena, 50+)*



UK press coverage is particularly polarised, negative and aggressive towards refugees and migrants compared to other European countries [5].

Repetitive, negative and derogatory media messages can be highly influential.

They weren't joking about the rain in this blessed country. At least I can warm up with a cup of tea...



At the asylum accommodation Camelia shares with 12 others...



You need to use the kitchen - ?

Sorry - no - sorry - it's ok



That man never washes his dishes properly



They said they lost the application was lost. Lost! No - I don't have another. They can't give me one...

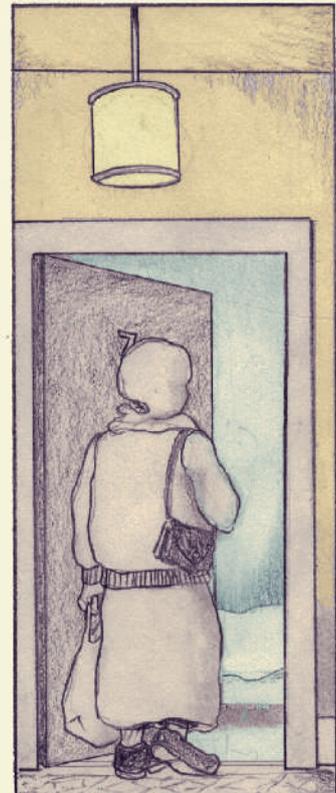


Mamma... Mamma...

Hush hush little angel, mamma is here...



Mamma...

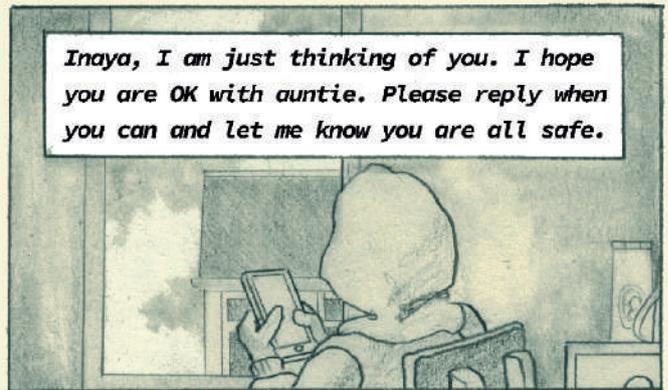
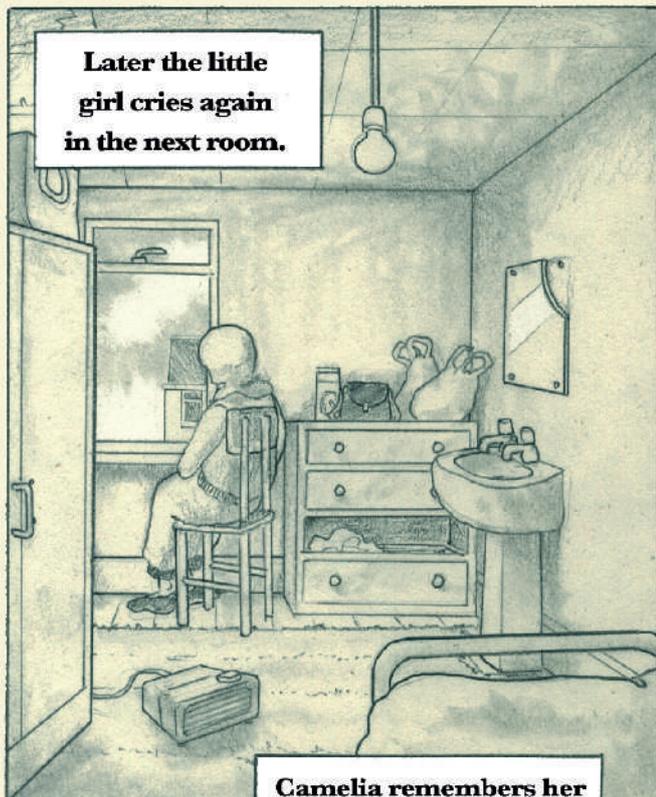
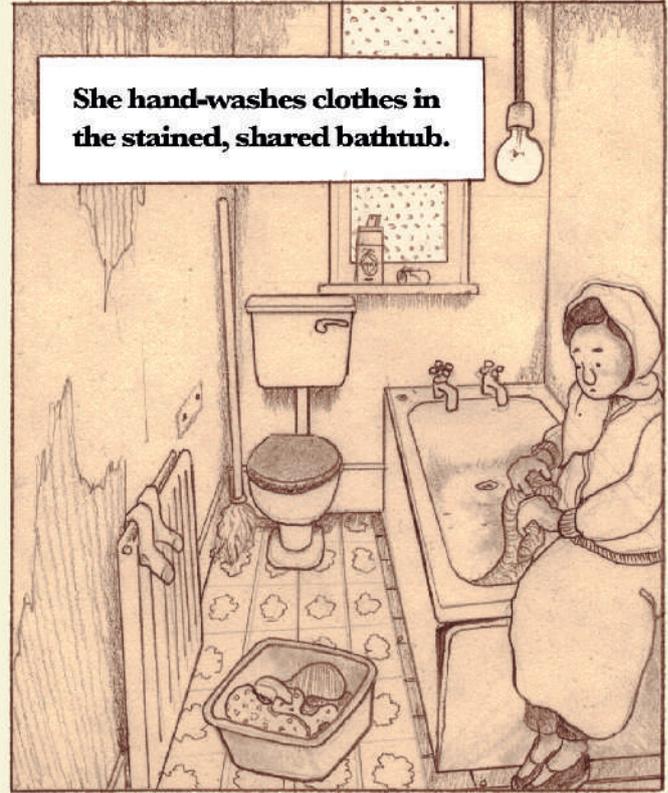
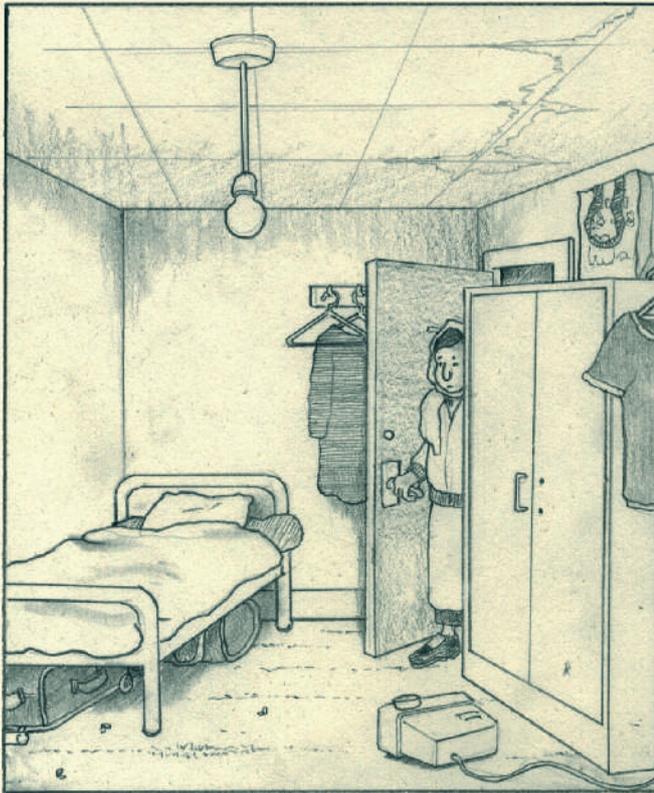


While seeking asylum, the Home Office provides people with no-choice housing, often in 'hard to let' properties which Council tenants do not want to live in[7]. This also includes disused military sites, hotels, B&Bs, hostels and multiple occupancy housing.

"When I have to stay in different places and not having a place of my own, it's not safe or comfortable. It is affecting my mental health... When you're young... you have energy to handle the situation. But when you grow older it is really very difficult." (Shirley*, 50+)

"I worry about my health, loneliness was there... you come back to the house... 4 walls without TV, it's like you come back [to] darkness" (Yvette*, 55)

Alone in the dilapidated shared house, Camelia has no distraction from dark memories of the past, anxieties in the present and worries for the future.



Camelia remembers her own daughter as a child.

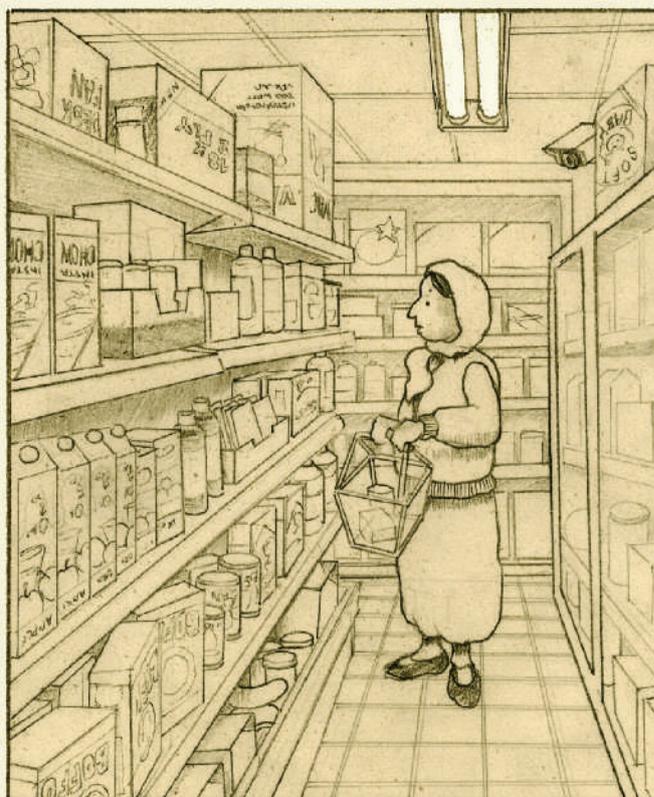
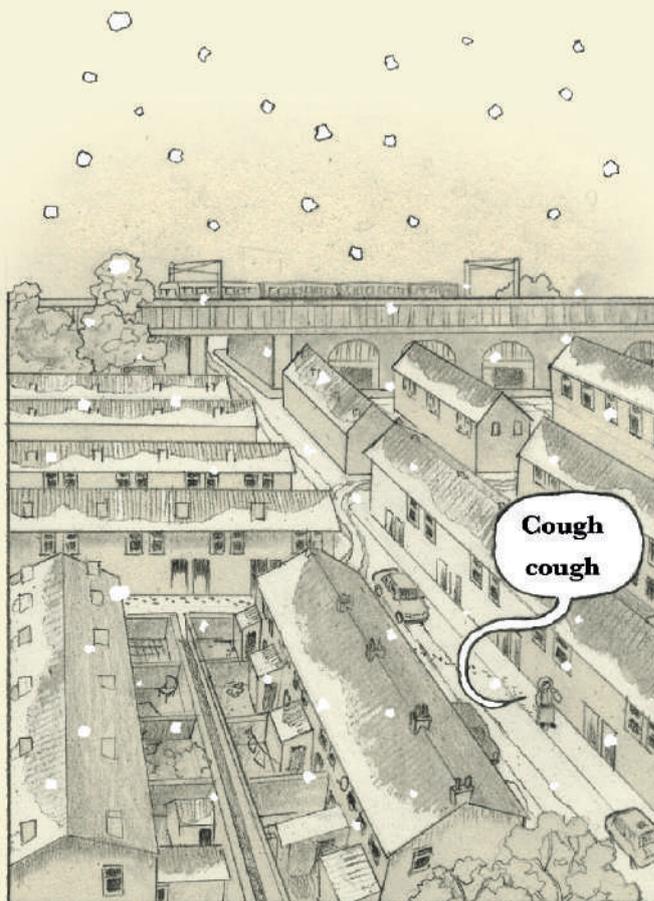


"We lost confidence...every grandmother, grandfather, mother, father feels that after they move here. Before in our country, we would work a lot. We can do a lot. We know everybody. And now, we think we are not enough." (Masoud*, 66)

"In my country we contact...every neighbour... we go to visit or have a party ... But this country...I didn't say hello to my neighbour [for] more than 1 or 2 months...it gives us ... depression." (Farid*, 63)

"When you are doing nothing, what you only concentrate is what is in your mind. Then you start like you are grinding mill... your mind is just working [all the time]" (Anthony*, 65)

WINTER

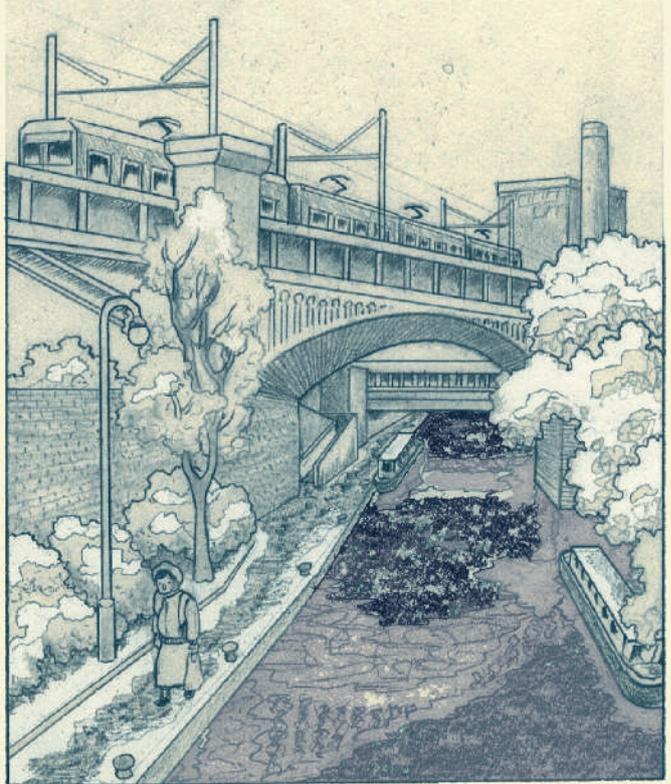


"People see me, they maybe pity me. People don't know what I go through. They need to walk a mile in my shoes. The most important thing is to have a home, shelter and to have a job. A normal person my age does have these things." (Shirley*, 50+)

"I am 54. I feel like I am at the edge of my death, and I worry... What will my daughter do if I die?" (Afnan*, 54)

"Wherever a British person is in the whole world, they make sure they come back home for Christmas with their own parents. You go back your family. But you forgot I also need it... to go back to mommy and daddy. And to raise my own family. This is unfair. There is injustice." (Yvette*, 55)

It's not enough. You understand? Here, put back the cough syrup and then you can afford it. Understand? Not enough.



* translate *



Please come to the community centre tomorrow. Knock on my door at 9:30. Sada (next door)



Next Morning



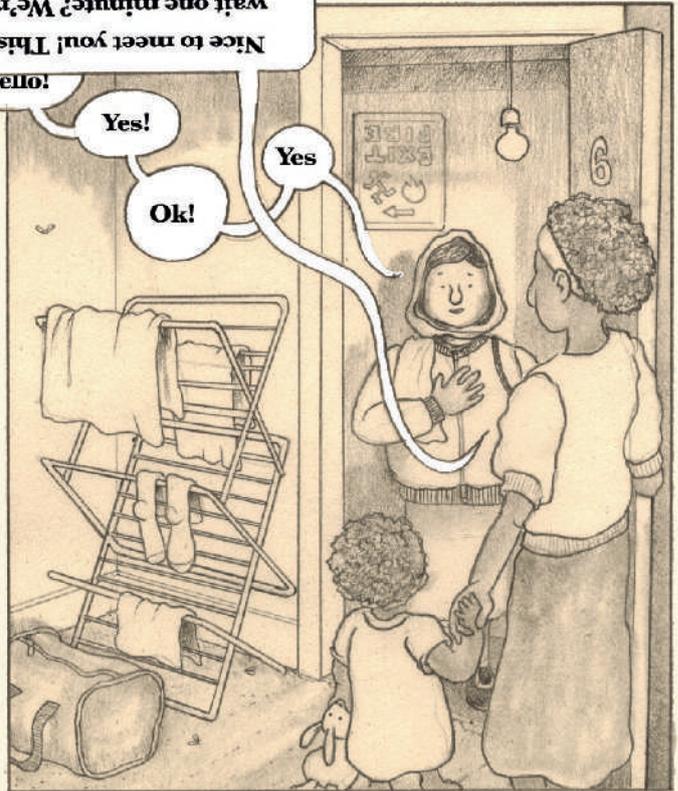
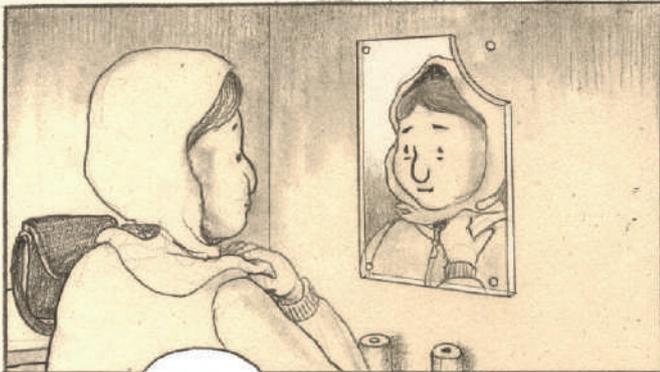
Nice to meet you! This is Idil. Can you wait one minute? We're not ready yet. I can get you plastic bags for your shoes. You understand? It's bad snow today.

Hallo!

Yes!

Ok!

Yes



Wait for me!

I couldn't find any dry socks...

Camella -this is Farah...

We're taking Camella with us today, ok?

Hello! Ok!



So you don't speak any English Camella?

No - little..

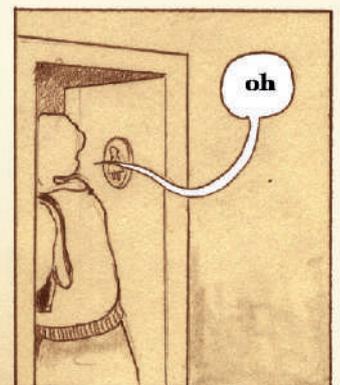
It's ok! She will learn like we did



"These charities, they are very important to us. Without this, I don't know how we are going to go about this asylum... they are genuine people who just sacrifice their life to help others... they are doing a wonderful job."
 (Anthony*, 65)

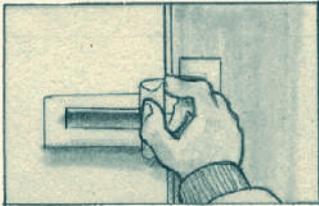


The room was full of talk and people were friendly but Camelia couldn't understand or be understood. She felt suddenly more lost than ever.





I'm sorry, I didn't mean to intrude!



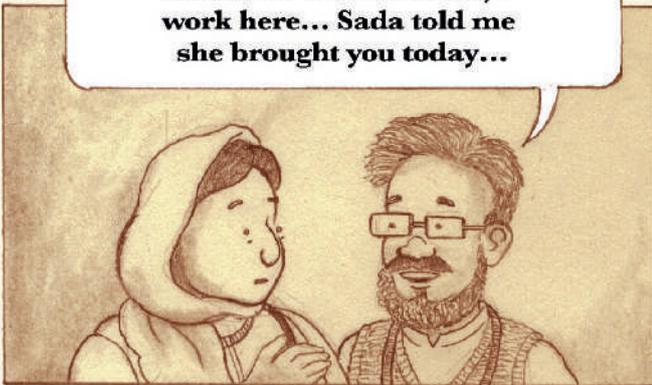
Why is she washing there?
Poor woman...



I'll wait until I hear her leave and then...



Camelia? I'm Houman, I work here... Sada told me she brought you today...



You don't know anybody here in Manchester?

Nobody!

Well, now you do!



It's so nice to meet you! It's so good to be able to understand someone!

"I go there, to the charity. I see many people... all so happy. Oh, my country people [are] here! I start to hug everybody [and] start to speak my own language with some people... they say you are welcome, don't worry, here [you are] safe."
(Sahar*, 52)

This event is run by a charity here in Manchester. It is for people seeking sanctuary, like you.

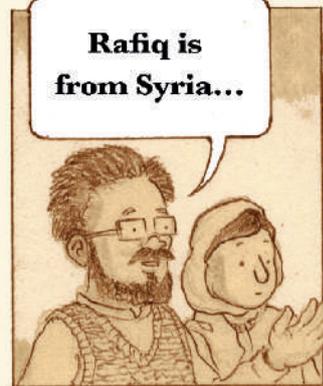
Where is everybody from?

All over!

Lule, there with her son - she is from Albania...



Rafiq is from Syria...

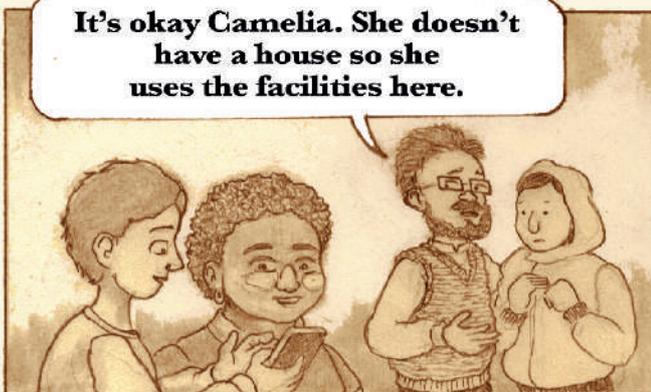


...Suzy is Congolese...

I am embarrassed. I walked in on her washing in the bathroom.

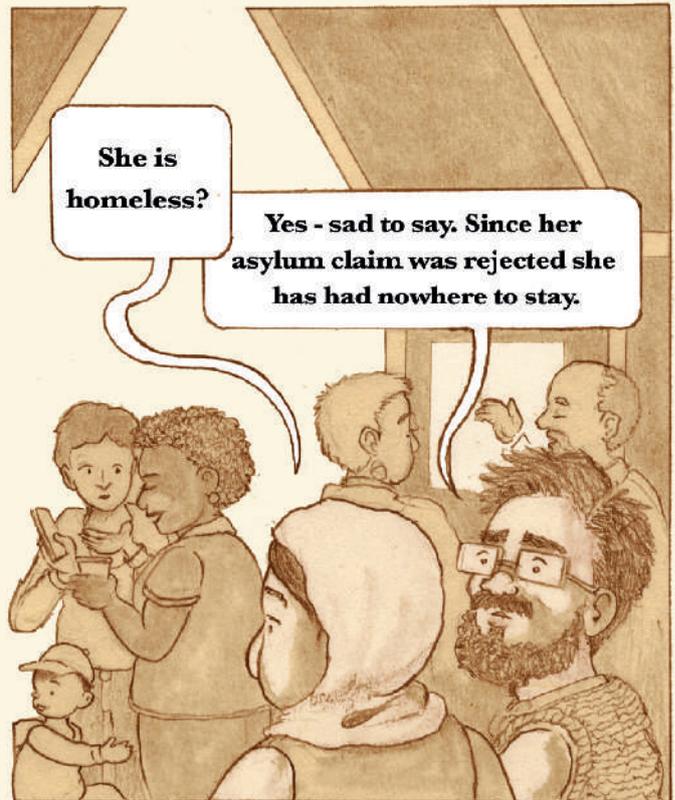


It's okay Camelia. She doesn't have a house so she uses the facilities here.



She is homeless?

Yes - sad to say. Since her asylum claim was rejected she has had nowhere to stay.



Many people experience homelessness while seeking asylum. Even after receiving refugee status, people are given only 28 days to move out of government assigned housing to their own accommodation.

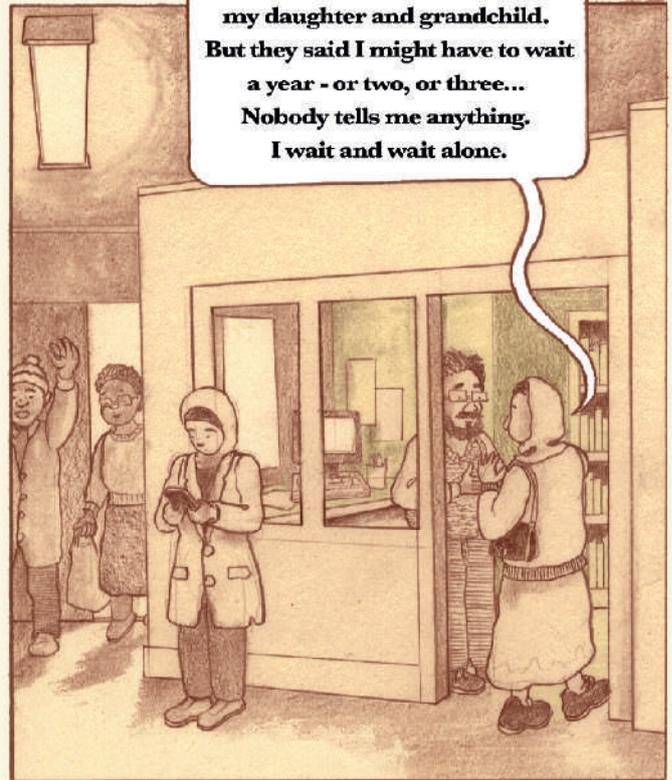
"It was my bathroom, McDonalds... inside wiping my body... I wash my clothes clean ... and I just dry it under the [hand drier]"
(Imara*, 52)

But we do our best to help people. Everybody here is a family. We help each other. Are there things you need help with, Camelia?

So many things! I can't speak English - I don't know anybody - I have been so lost.

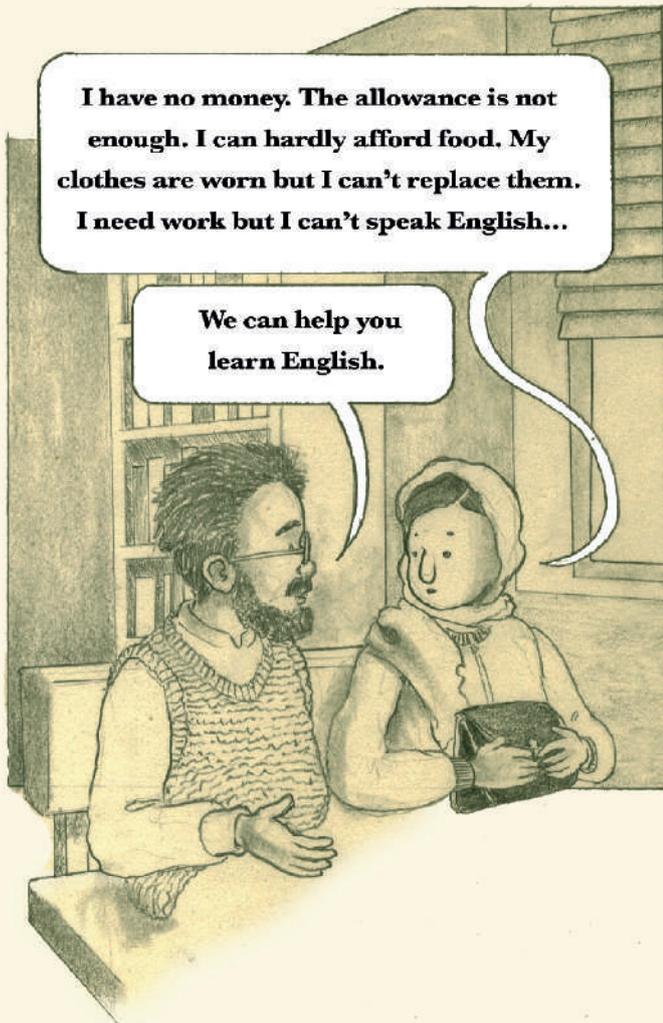


When I arrived here I thought I was safe. I thought I could bring my daughter and grandchild. But they said I might have to wait a year - or two, or three... Nobody tells me anything. I wait and wait alone.



I have no money. The allowance is not enough. I can hardly afford food. My clothes are worn but I can't replace them. I need work but I can't speak English...

We can help you learn English.



Yes! Please! That would be wonderful! Then I can get a job - I was a teacher at home, I love children -

I'm sorry Camelia, that won't be possible. You are not allowed to work until your asylum claim has been accepted.

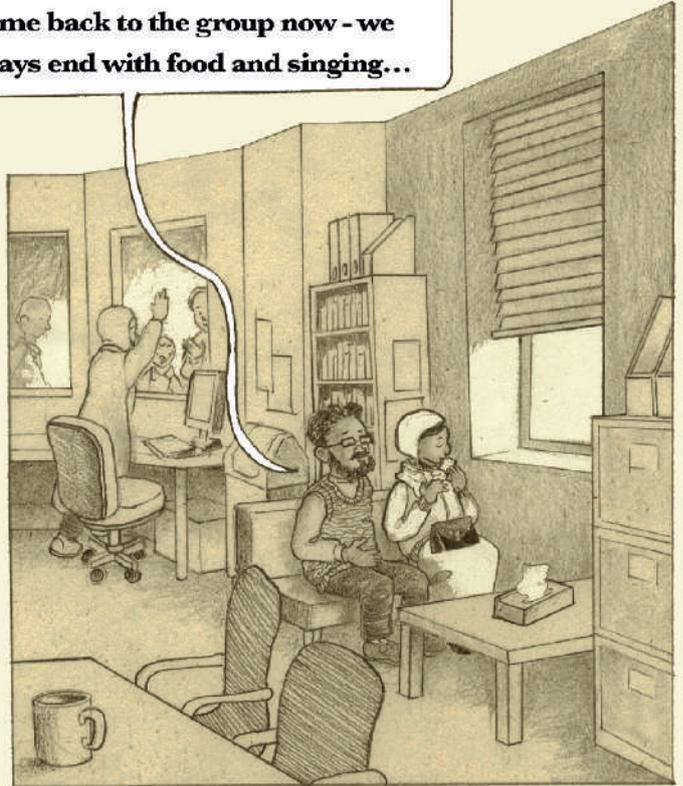


But I can't survive! If I was young like Sada, maybe - but I'm old and alone. They killed my husband. My daughter is a thousand miles away...

Try not to worry about everything at once. We can speak again next week. Come back to the group now - we always end with food and singing...

Here, take a tissue, Camelia...

And what if they reject me like Suzy? Will I be destitute too, trying to survive on the street?



Camelia tried to push the worries from her mind. She was amongst friends. All so different - but all in the same boat. The mood lifted as everybody sang and danced.

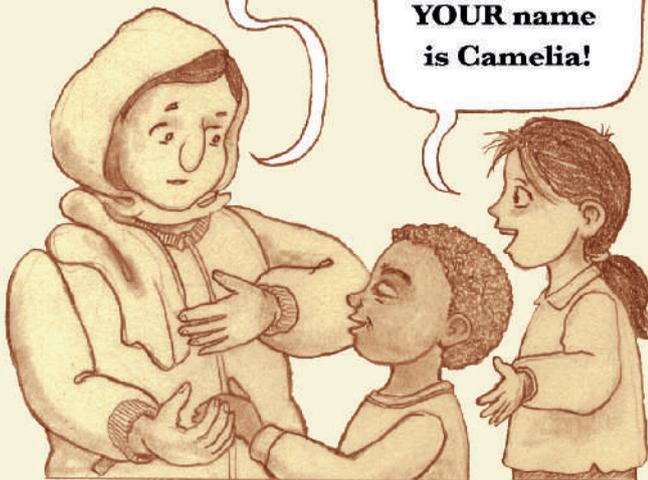


She was too shy to sing. But at Sada's suggestion, a little boy and girl started to teach her English words.

Your name is Camelia

"Your name is Camelia"

No! Ha ha ha - YOUR name is Camelia!



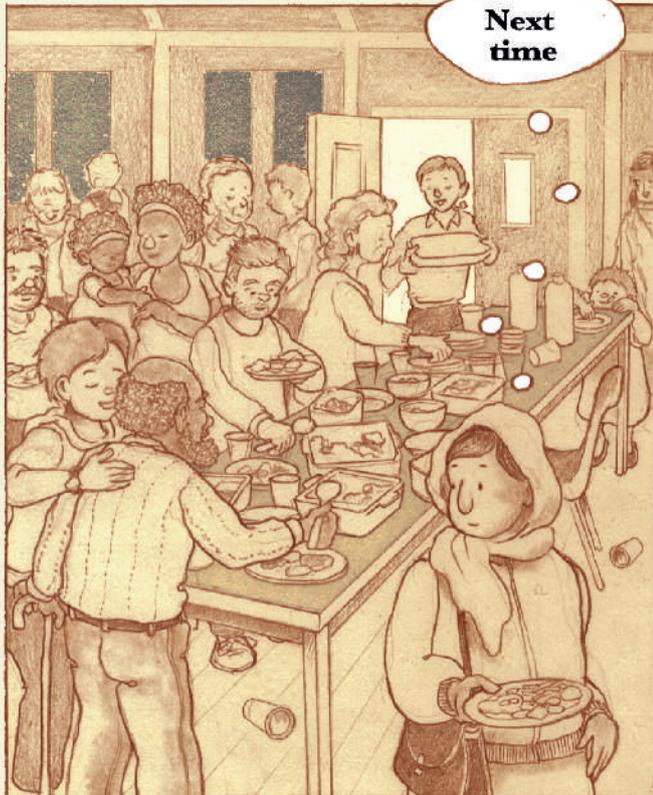
People had made food from all their own countries and brought it to share. Houman had a dish that Camelia's mother made her as a girl.



The taste brought back memories which made her happy and sad at once. She wished she had brought a dish of her own to share...



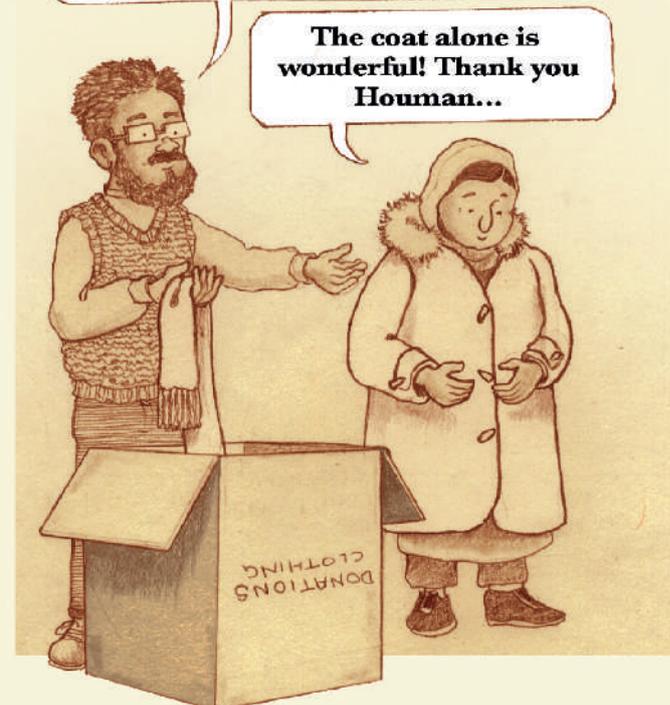
Next time



Then it was time to go. But before leaving, Houman discretely showed her the donation box in the office, and invited her to find a coat which would fit her.

Would a scarf be useful as well, Camelia? It has been so cold out there.

The coat alone is wonderful! Thank you Houman...



Her heart sank to step back out into the snow. She didn't want to return to her room. But she tried not to show her sadness to Sada and Farah. She only wished she could repay their kindness.

Idill! Don't
run too far
ahead!

Mind not to slip! Now the
snow has all turned to
blessed ice on the path!

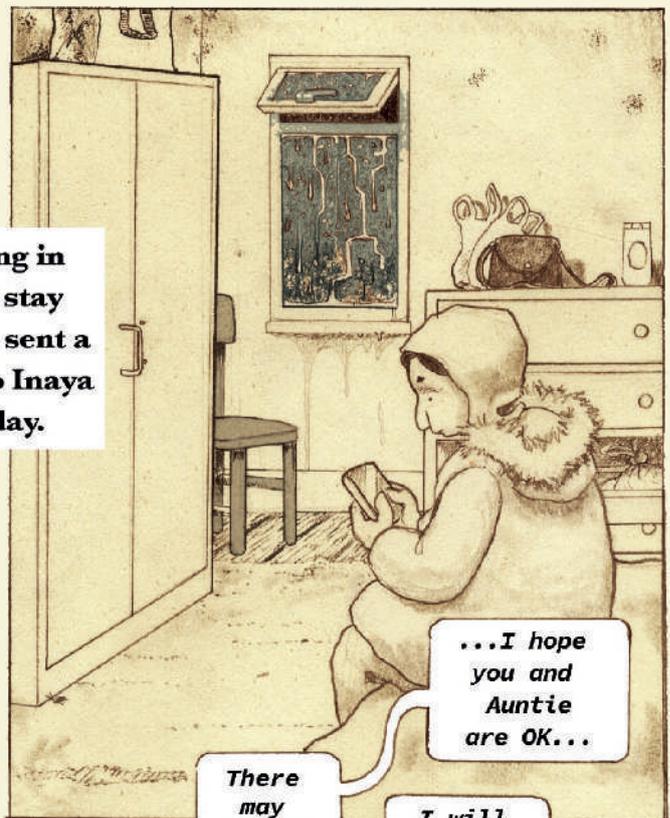
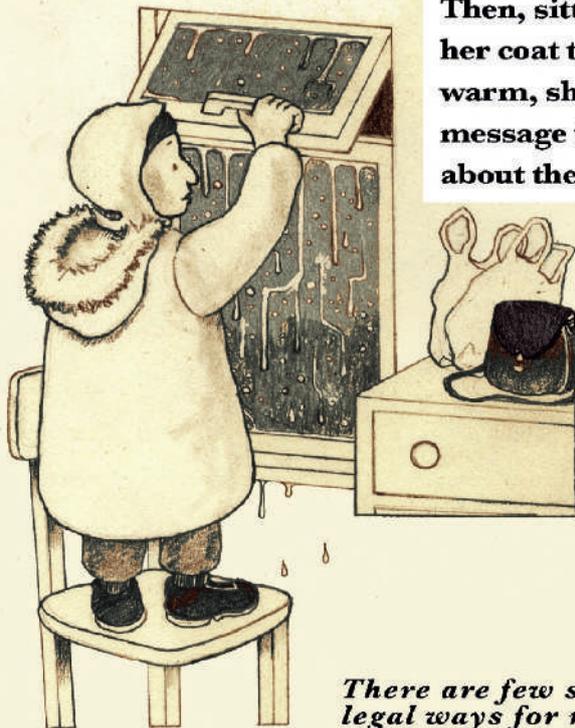
Idill! Wait
for mummy
and Carmelia!

Ha
ha ha!



Back at the house, the air was stale and damp. Mould had begun to grow. Camelia cleaned over and over but every time it came back worse. She opened the window to the wind.

Then, sitting in her coat to stay warm, she sent a message to Inaya about the day.



...I hope
you and
Auntie
are OK...

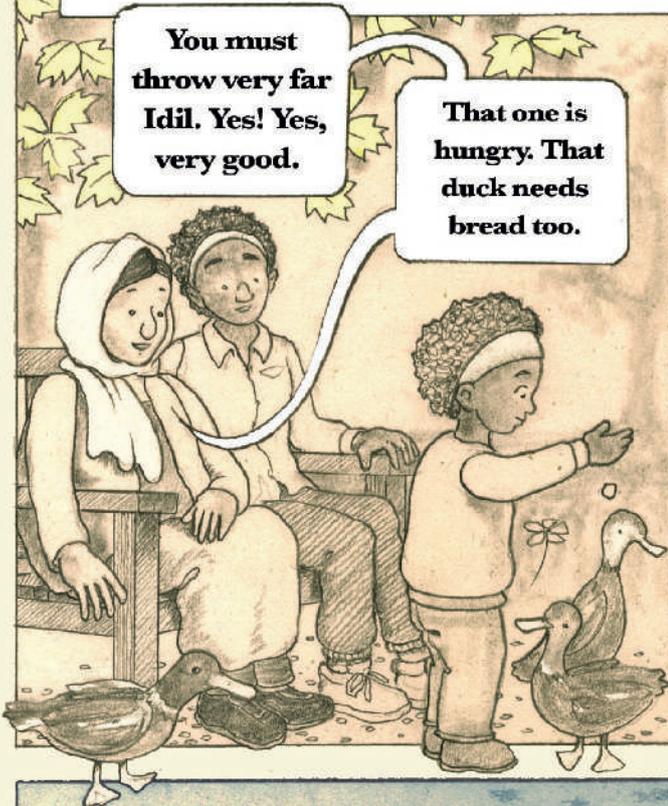
There
may
be help
soon

I will
call you

send

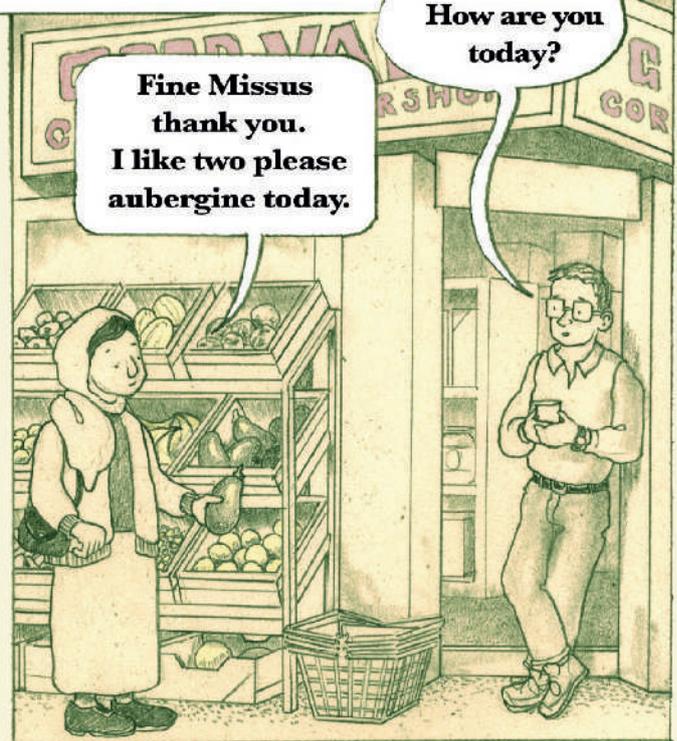
There are few straightforward, legal ways for refugees to safely join family members in the UK.

Months went by. Camelia began to learn English.
With help from Sada, Farah and Houman, she gradually felt less alone.



You must throw very far Idil. Yes! Yes, very good.

That one is hungry. That duck needs bread too.



Fine Missus thank you. I like two please aubergine today.

Hello duck. How are you today?

Still she was anxious, frustrated, and struggled still to afford all she needed to live decently.



But she made herself useful, volunteering at the community centre where she was delighted to look after the kids or help to arrange get-togethers...

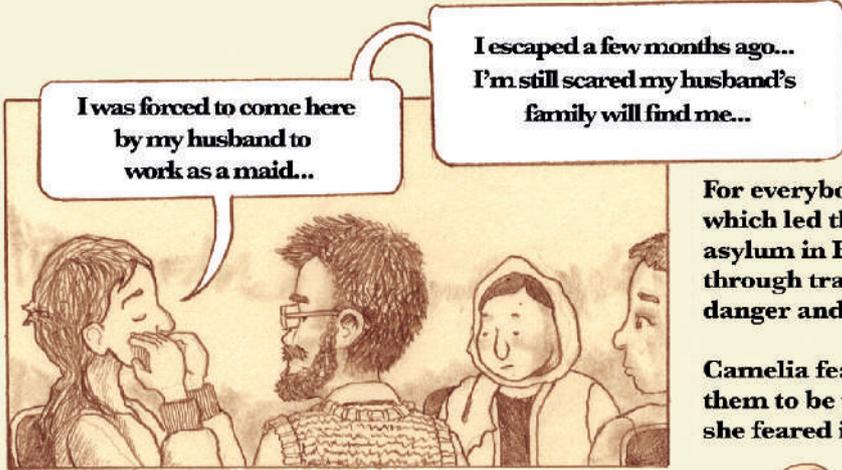


Come on children! Who will win? Run fast!



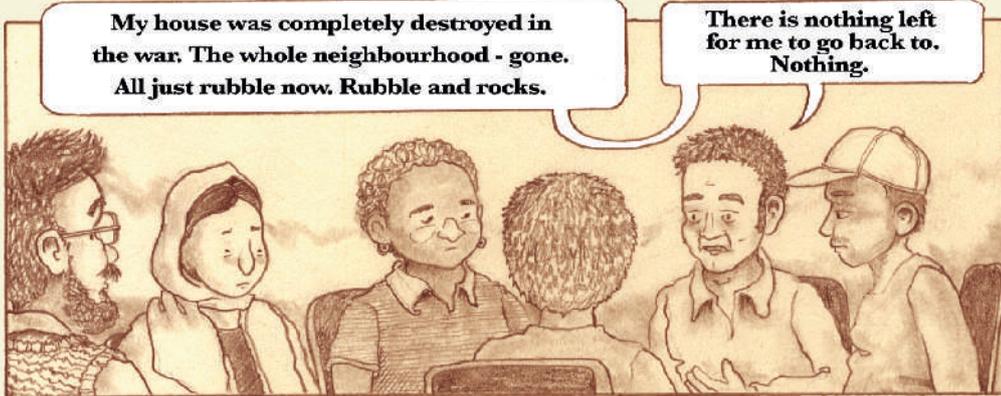
Spring

In time she made more friends, and set about helping other new arrivals get oriented. They all supported one another.

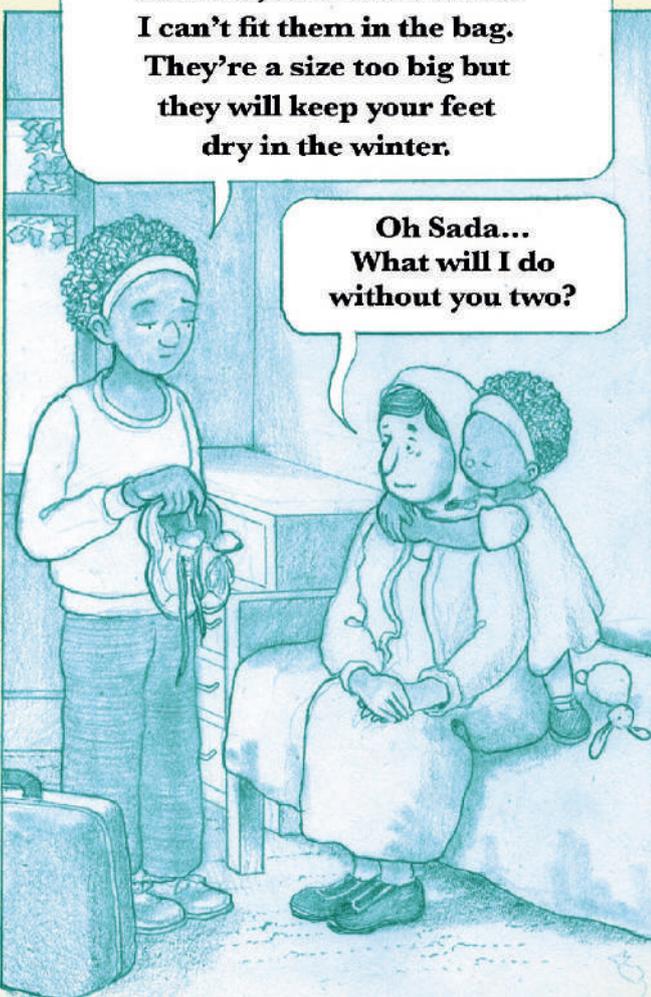
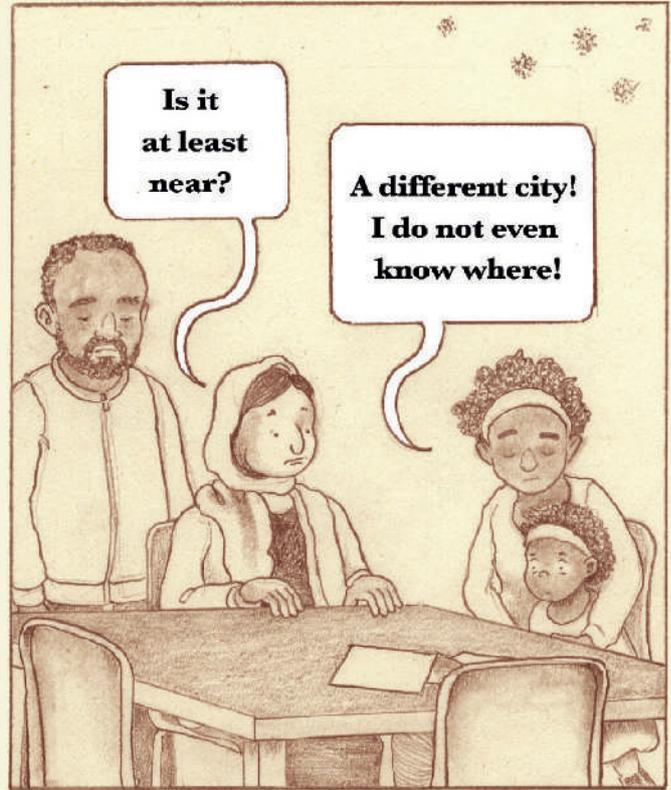


For everybody, the path which led them to claim asylum in England was through trauma, danger and loss.

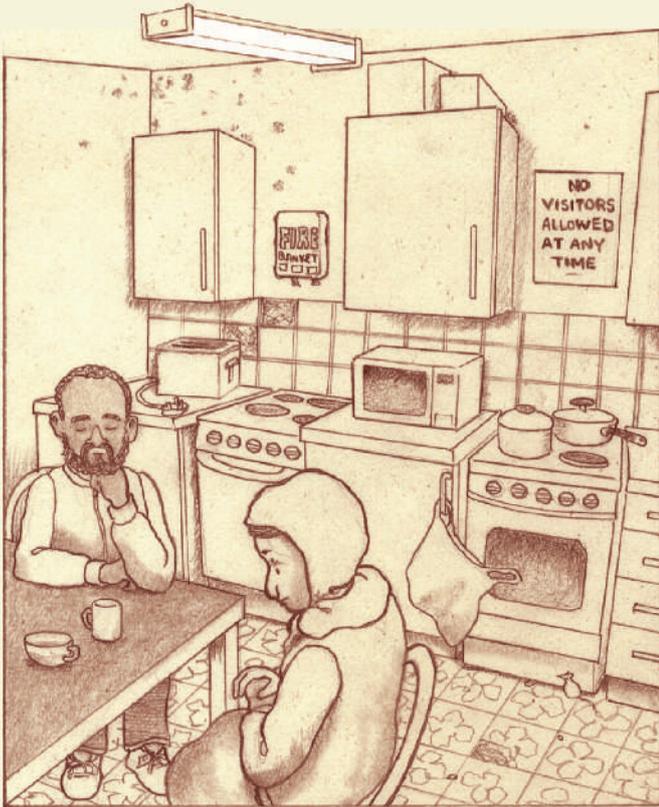
Camelia feared for any of them to be rejected. Just as she feared it for herself.



Some days she began to feel happy, and even at home in Manchester. But she never felt safe. Her asylum application cast an inescapable, chilling shadow on her, every moment. The authorities were inscrutable, and wielded their powers in ways that seemed arbitrary and cruel.



The UK dispersal policy means that asylum seekers can be housed anywhere in the UK, without any choice. Sometimes, people are relocated multiple times and at short-notice.



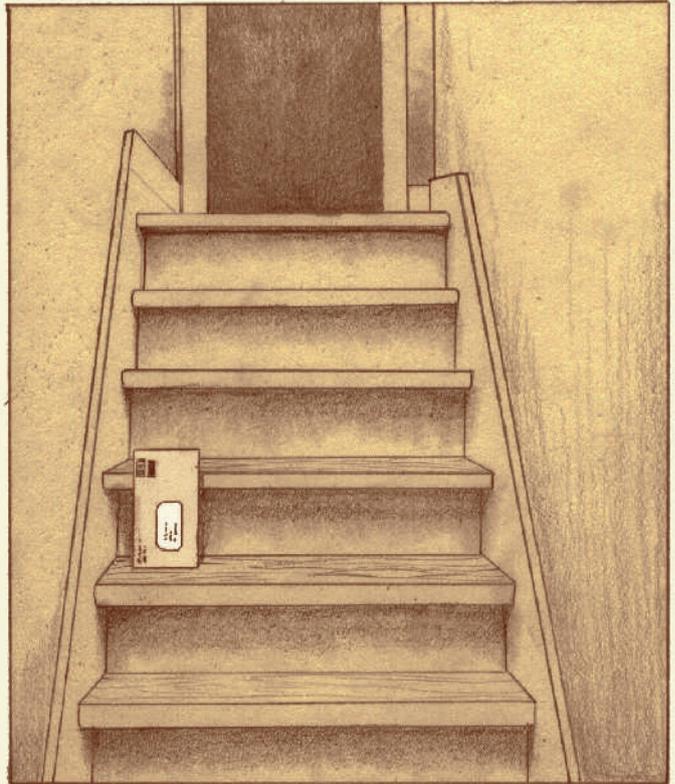
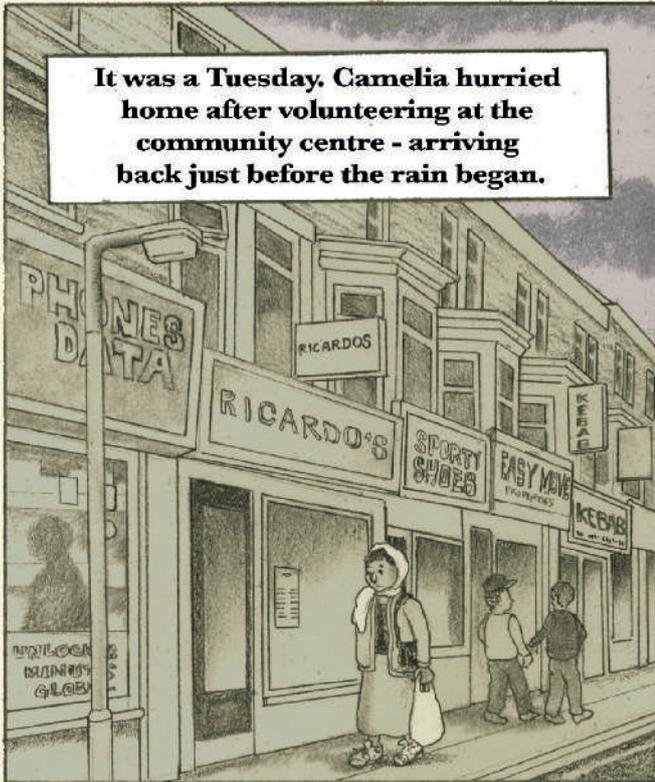
My dear Inaya... Today Sada left, I will miss her so much. I wish you could have met her. She is your age, I think you would like her. She was so kind to me and there was nothing I could do to help.



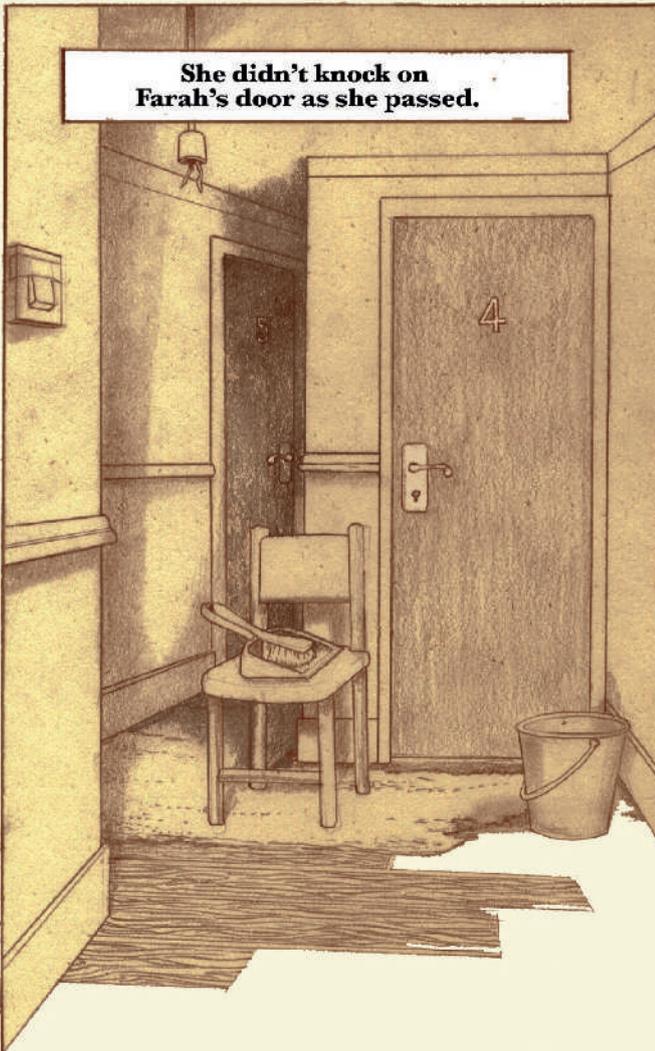
Just as I can do nothing to help you, my beloved daughter. But maybe our luck will be different. Maybe one day, maybe soon, they will grant me asylum.

The Home Office's decision on her asylum application, came sooner than for many.

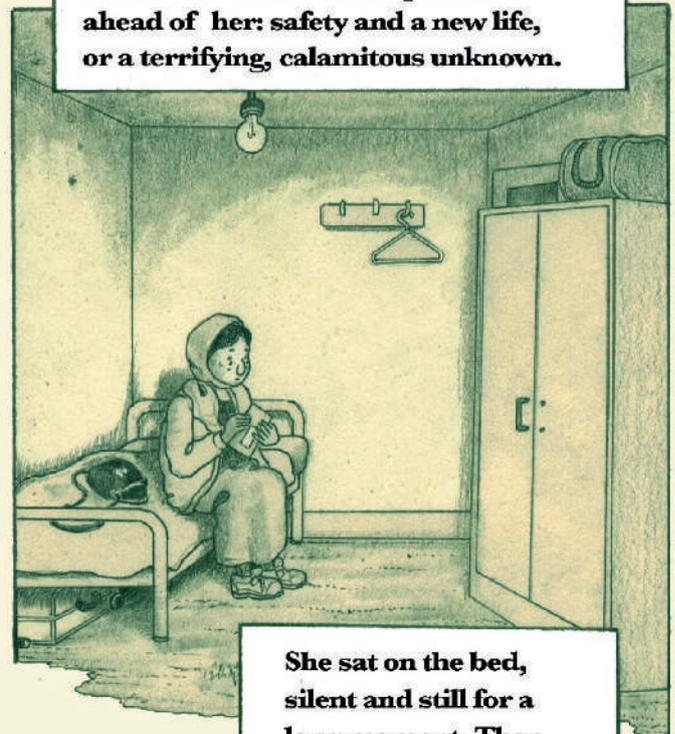
It was a Tuesday. Camelia hurried home after volunteering at the community centre - arriving back just before the rain began.



She didn't knock on Farah's door as she passed.



She went alone upstairs and shut the door behind her. Her fate was in her hands. Two futures sprawled ahead of her: safety and a new life, or a terrifying, calamitous unknown.



She sat on the bed, silent and still for a long moment. Then she opened the letter.

Over half of people seeking asylum must wait over 1 and a half years to receive a decision from the Home Office. Some people spend more than 20 years in limbo, waiting for a decision on whether or not they can stay in the UK [8,9].

“I’m almost finished 4 years as an asylum seeker here... You don’t know what will take place each and every day. You wake up, you sleep, your mind will be asking yourself what is going to happen. So now you will be in the middle of torture from your country [and] at the same time [torture] from the Home Office.”
(Elijah*, 50)

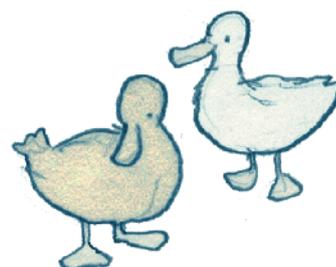
“At first when I claimed, I would like to have [had] my own restaurant, that was my dream. But to be honest, when in this position, you don’t have dreams as I can’t do anything about it.”
(Shirley*, 50+)

“This country is not bad, it’s good, you know. Especially...freedom because we haven’t any freedom in my country.”
(Helma*, 64)

“I find most people here very, very friendly and [they] accept foreign people. They respect them and [they are] very patient.”
(Farid*, 63)

“I am very happy because after [my children] came here they are they were educated. Two of them have a PhD!”
(Masoud*, 66)

“Now I’m better because I get my paper... I am strong and I feel good.”
(Gloria*, 58)



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Seeking asylum is a human right.

"We would like to appeal to the UK Government to end the hostile environment, so others don't have to experience the same that we have" (Sahar, 52)*

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If you have any questions about Echoes of Displacement, please contact Tess at tess.hartland@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.



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