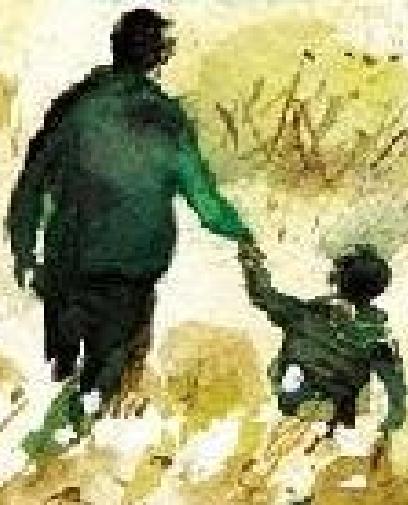


Sea Prayer



KHALED HOSSEINI

bestselling author of *The Kite Runner*

ILLUSTRATED BY DAN WILLIAMS

BLOOMSBURY

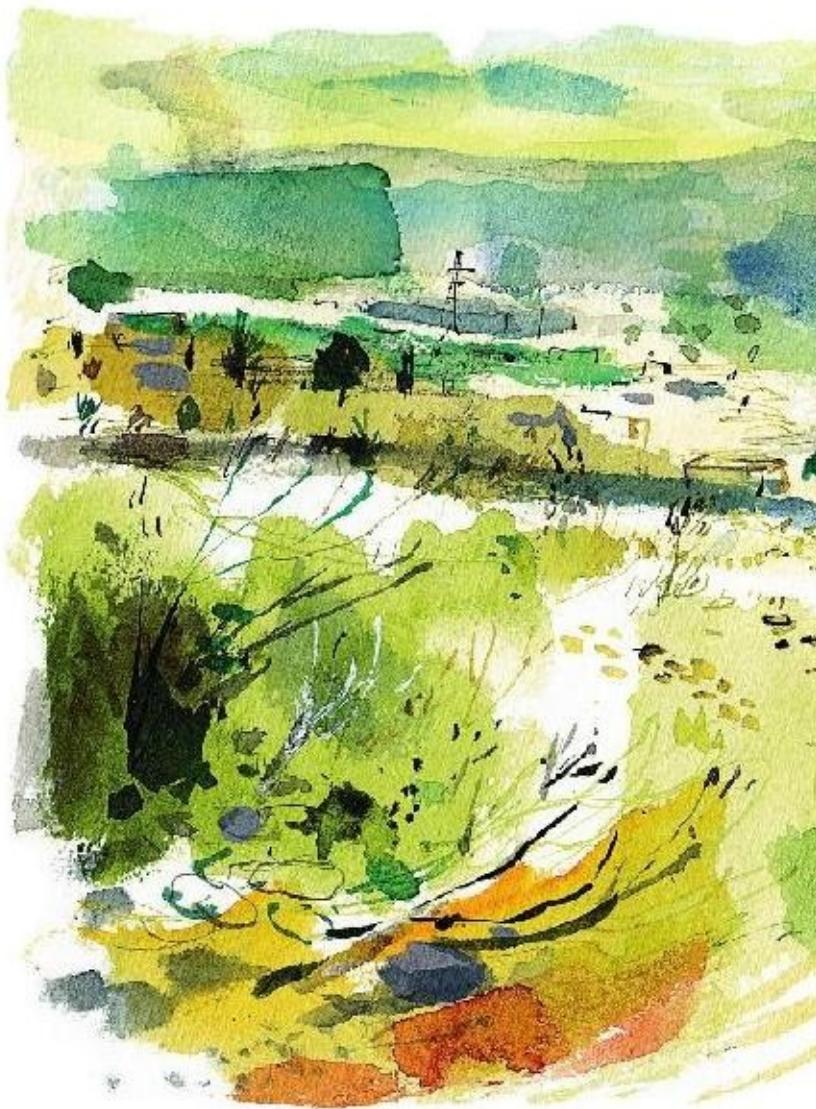
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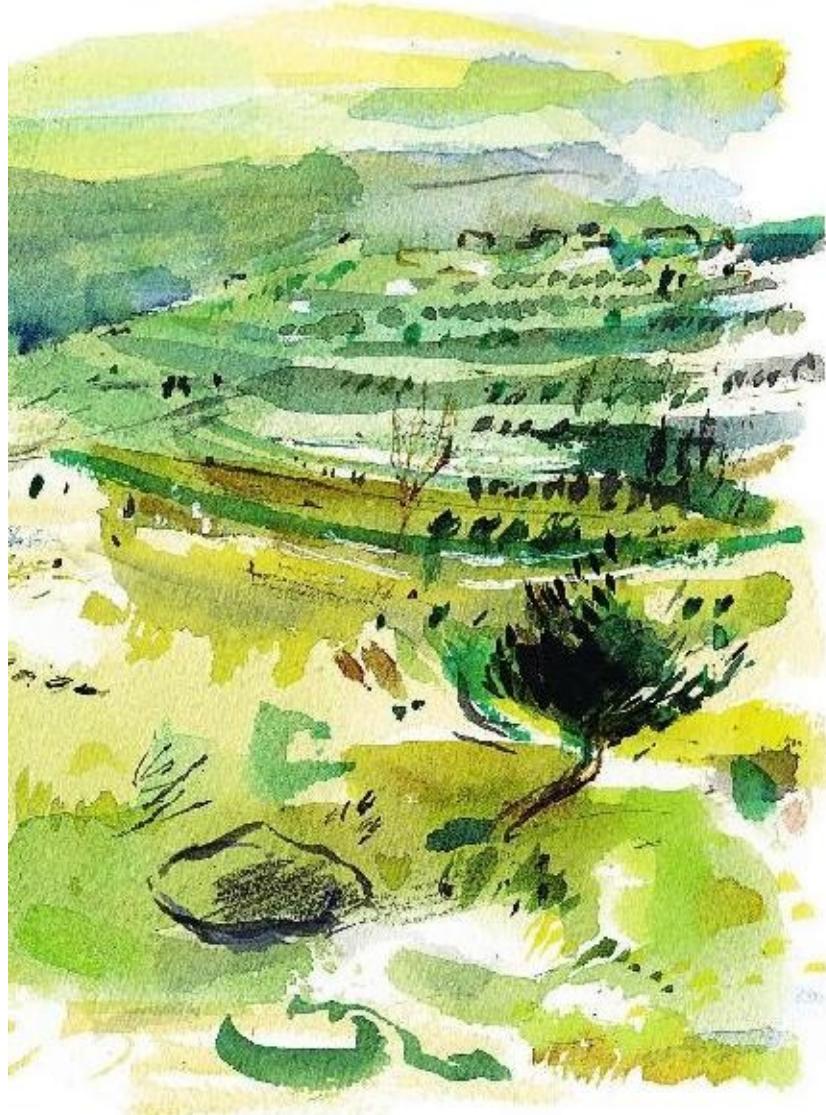
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Sea Prayer

Khaled Hosseini

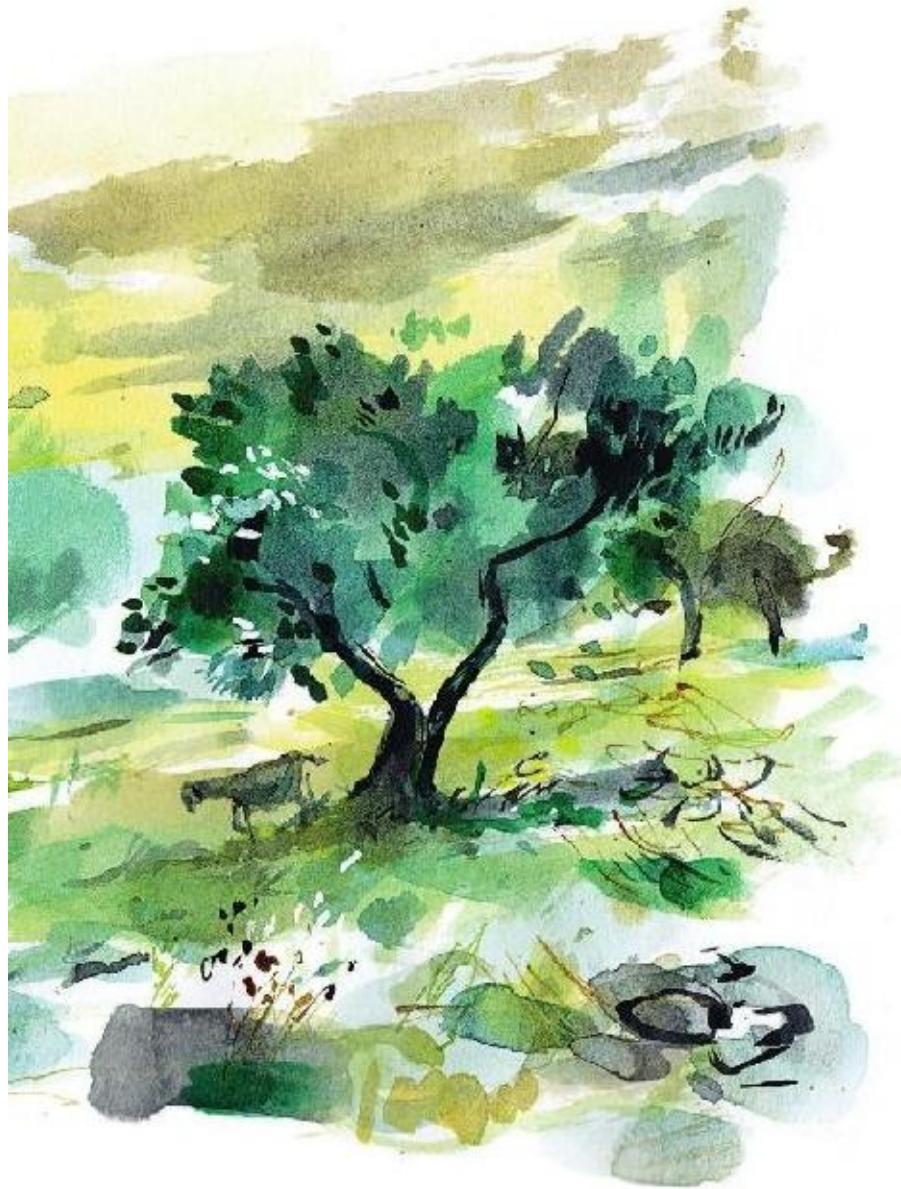
My dear Marwan,
in the long summers of childhood, when I was a boy the age you are now,
your uncles and I
spread our mattress on the roof of your grandfather's farmhouse outside of
Homs.





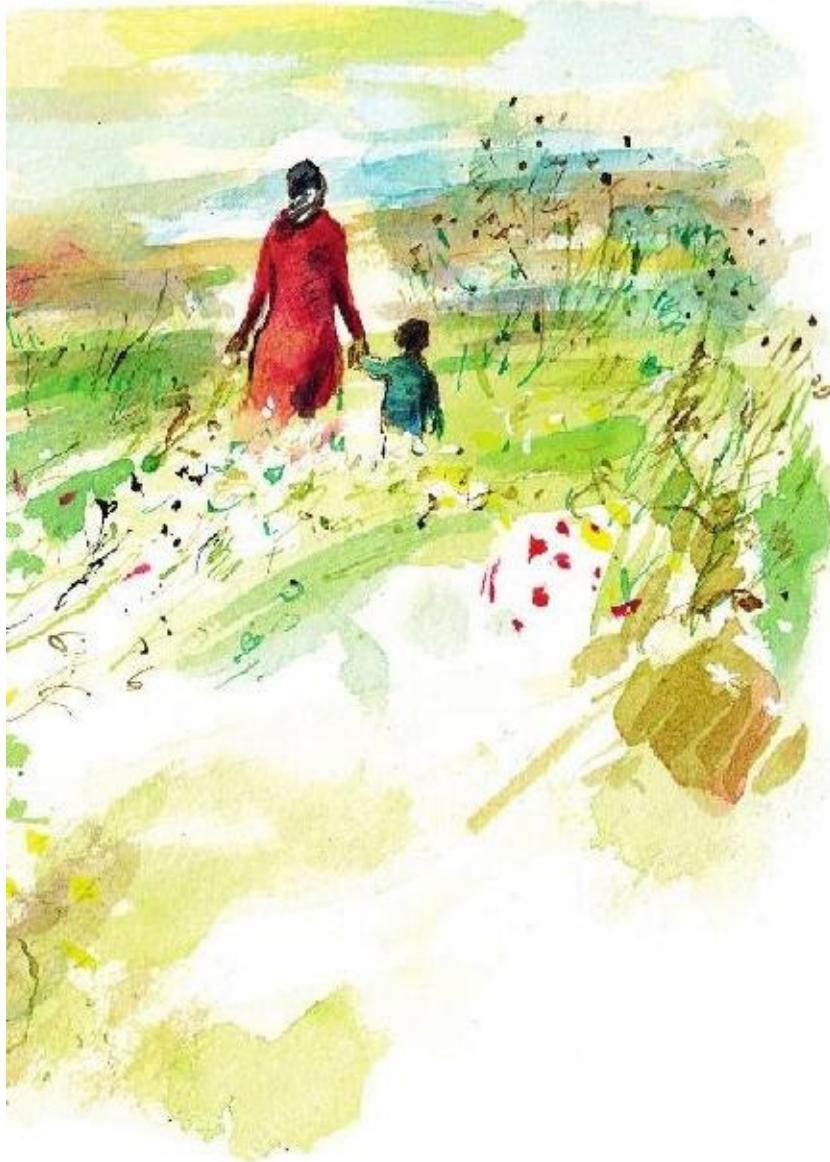


We woke in the mornings
to the stirring of olive trees in the breeze, to the bleating of your
grandmother's goat, the clanking of her cooking pots, the air cool and the sun a
pale rim of persimmon to the east.





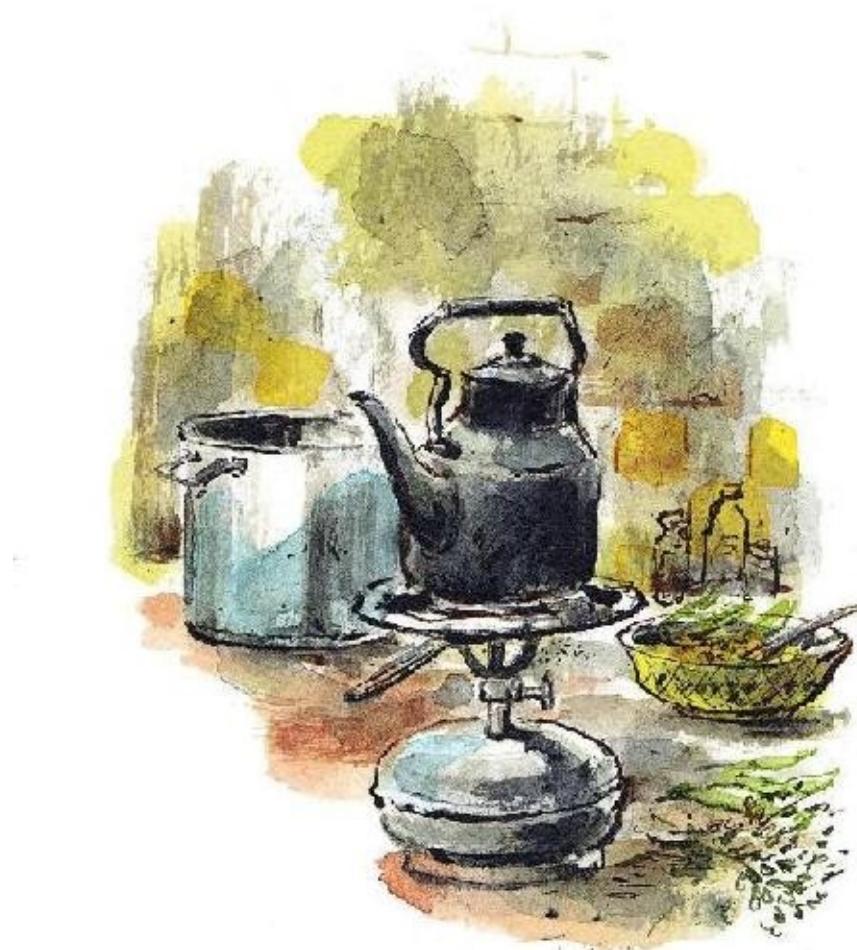
We took you there when you were a toddler.



I have a sharply etched memory of your mother from that trip, showing you a herd of cows grazing in a field blown through with wild flowers.

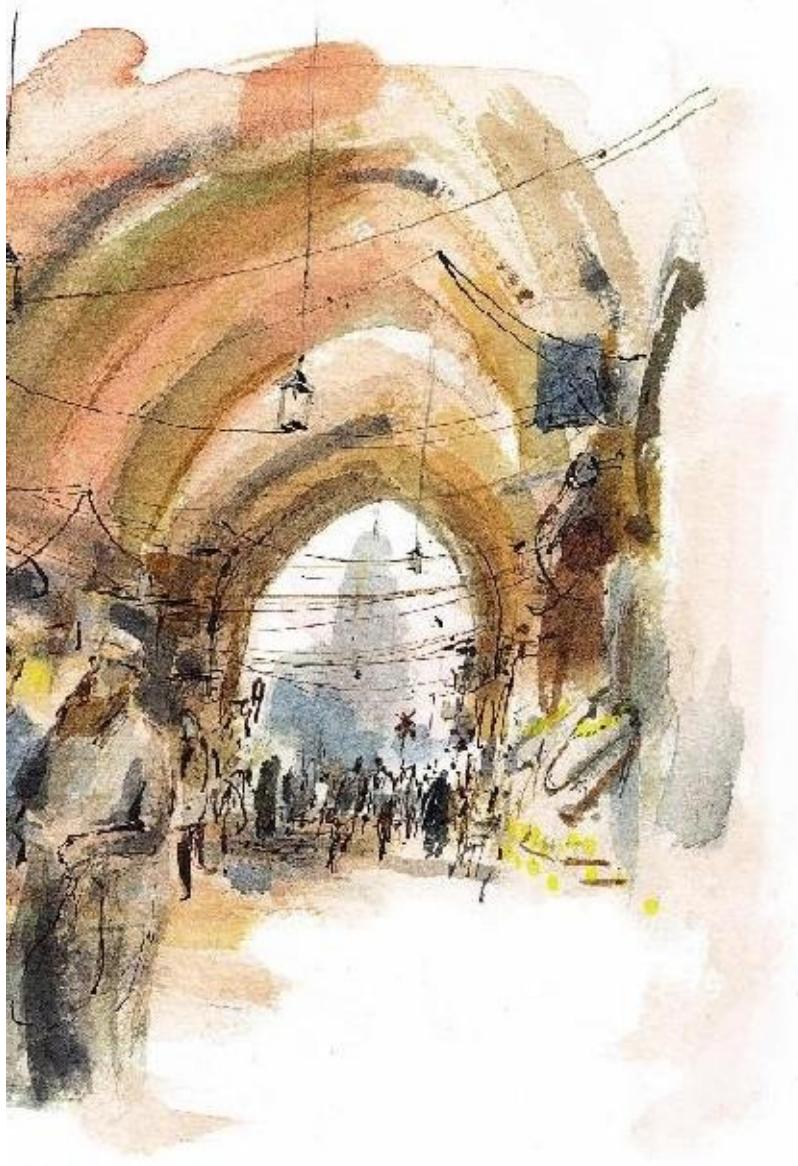
I wish you hadn't been so young.

You wouldn't have forgotten the farmhouse, the soot of its stone walls, the creek where your uncles and I built a thousand boyhood dams.





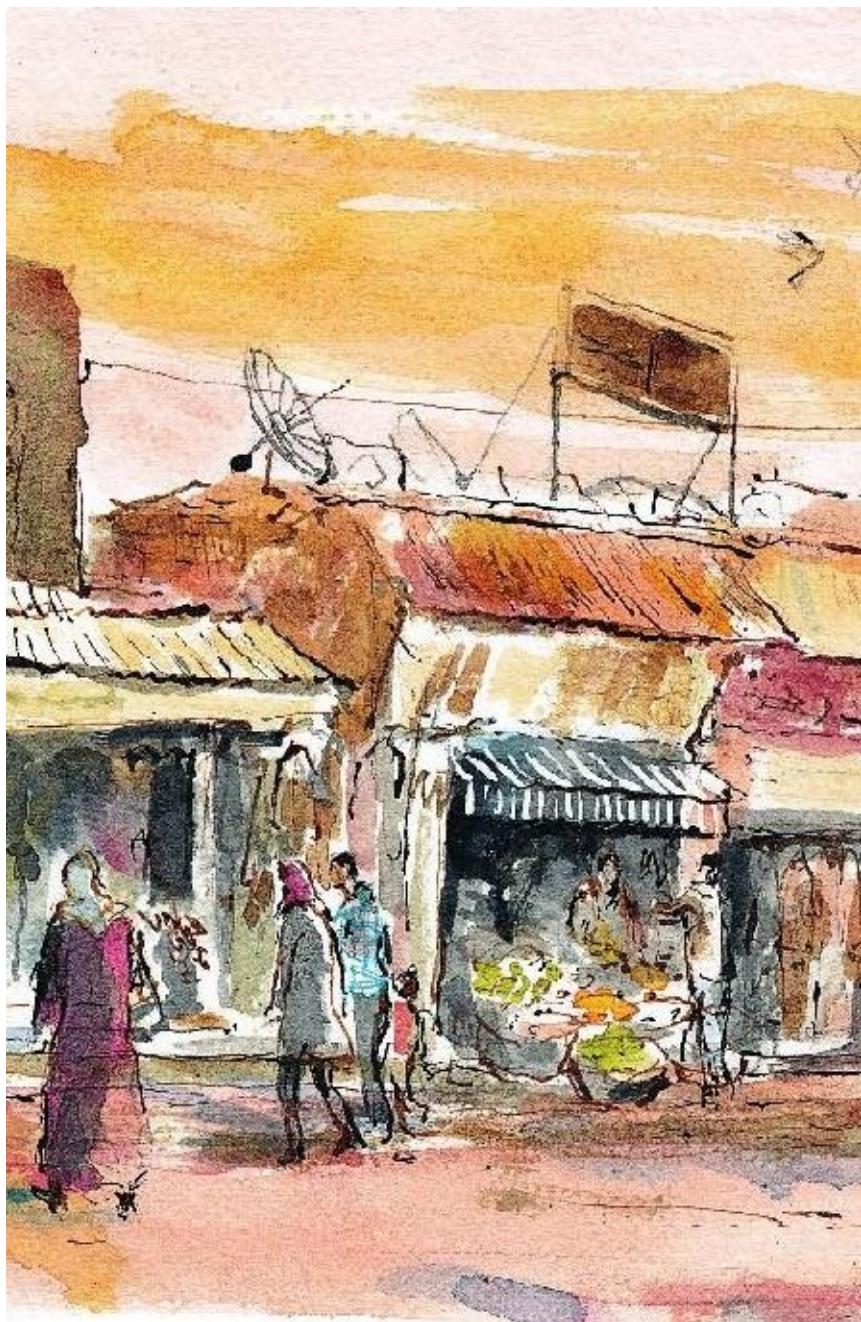
I wish you remembered Homs as I do, Marwan.

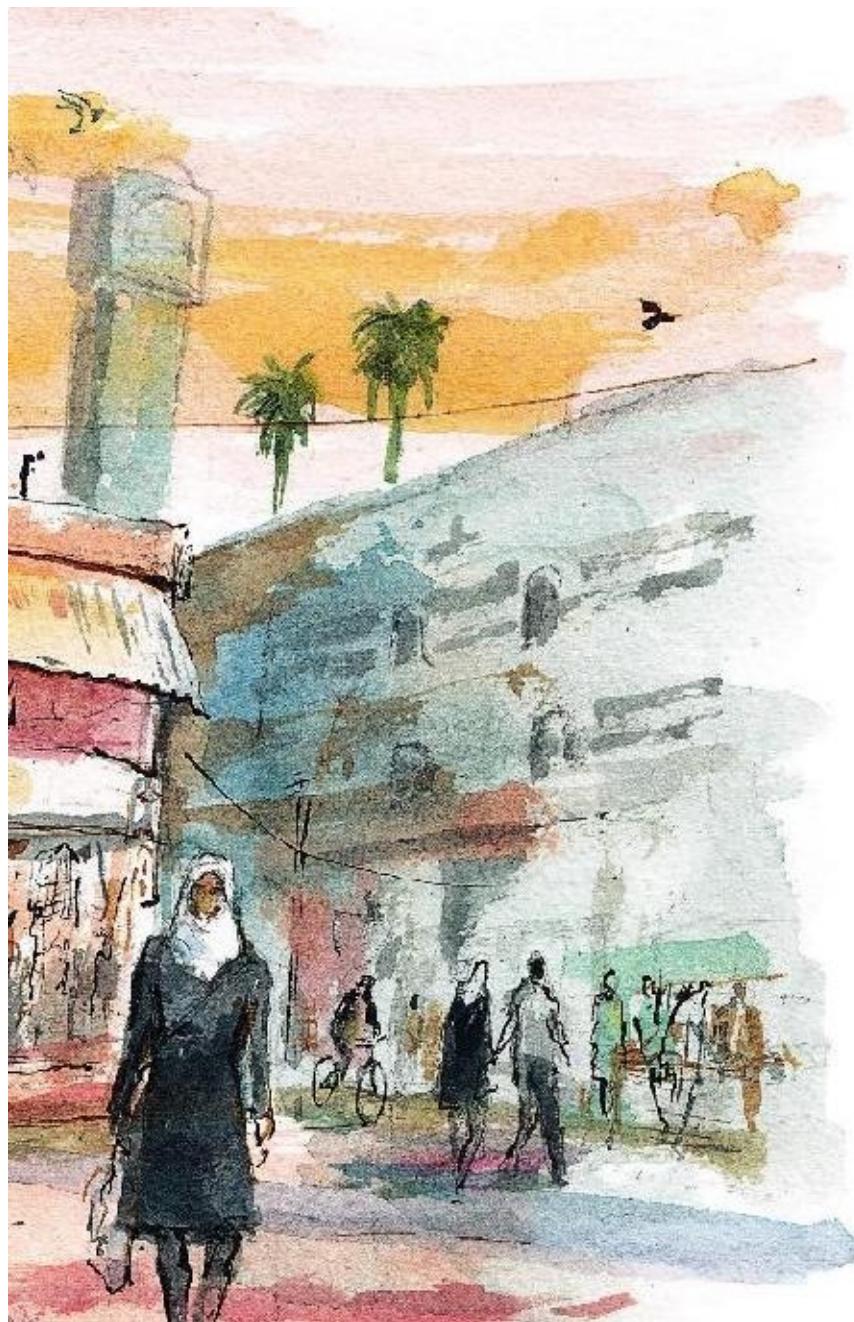


In its bustling Old City, a mosque for us Muslims, a church for our Christian neighbours, and a grand souk for us all to haggle over gold pendants and fresh produce and bridal dresses.



I wish you remembered
the crowded lanes smelling of fried kibbeh and the evening walks we took
with your mother
around Clock Tower Square.





But that life, that time, seems like a dream now,
even to me,
like some long-dissolved rumour.



First came the protests.
Then the siege.

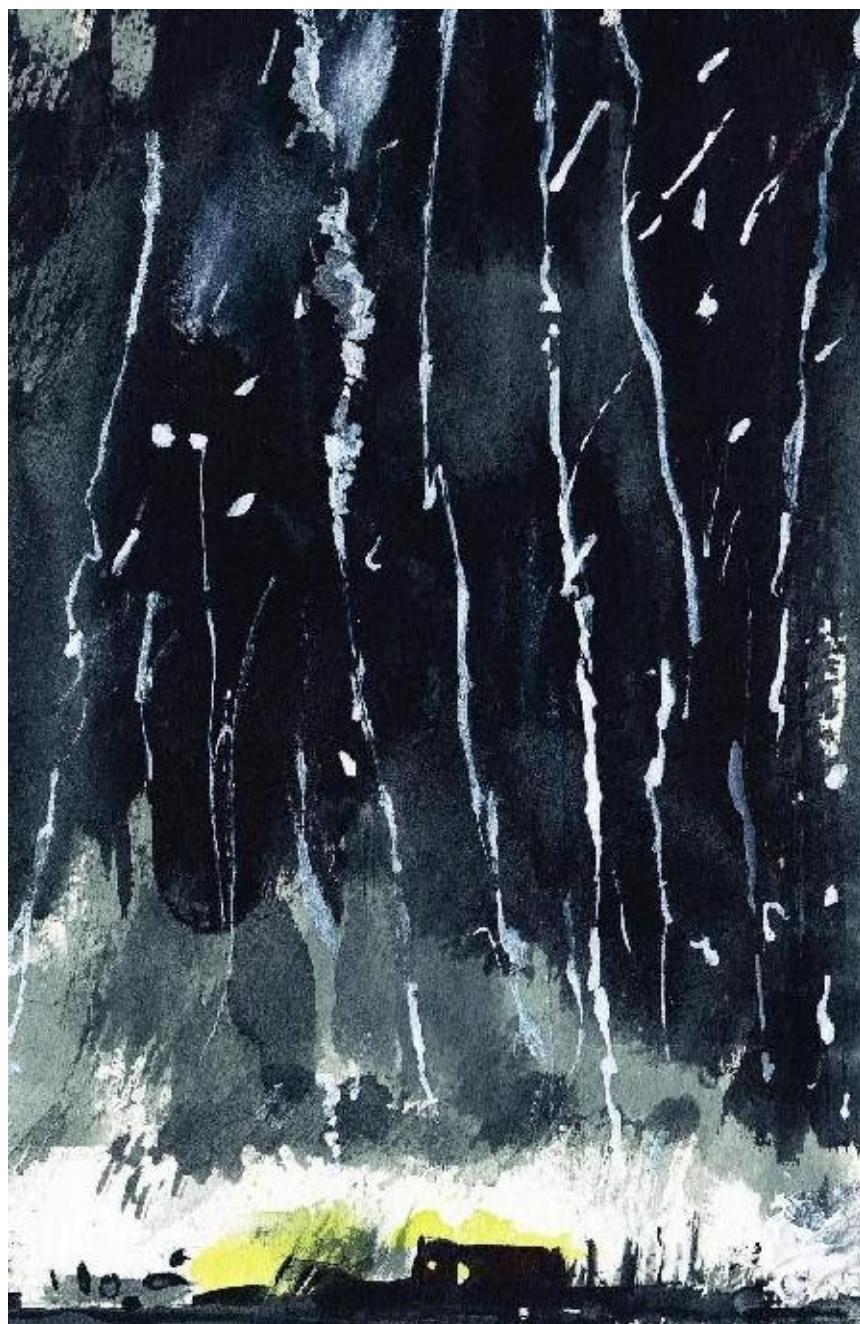




The skies spitting bombs.

Starvation.

Burials.





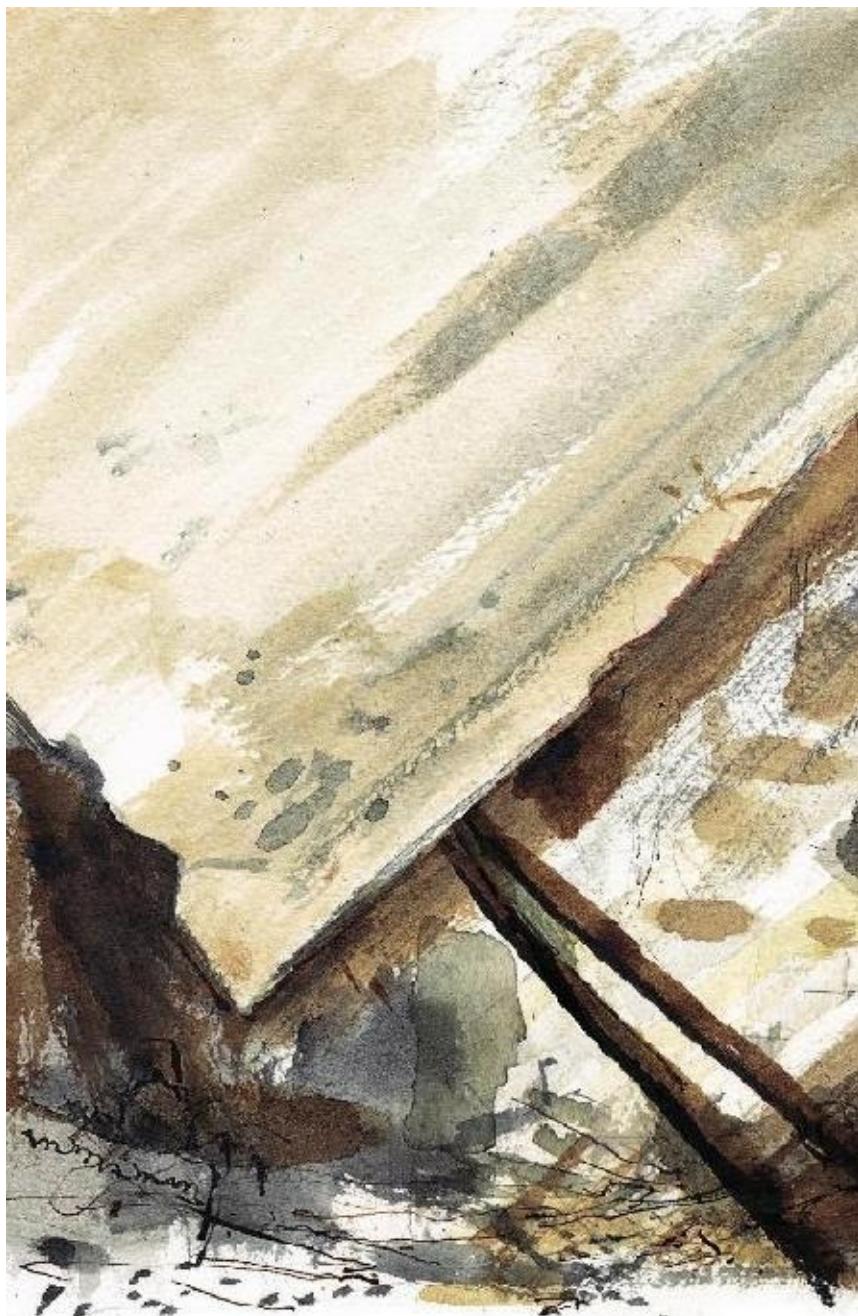
These are the things you know.



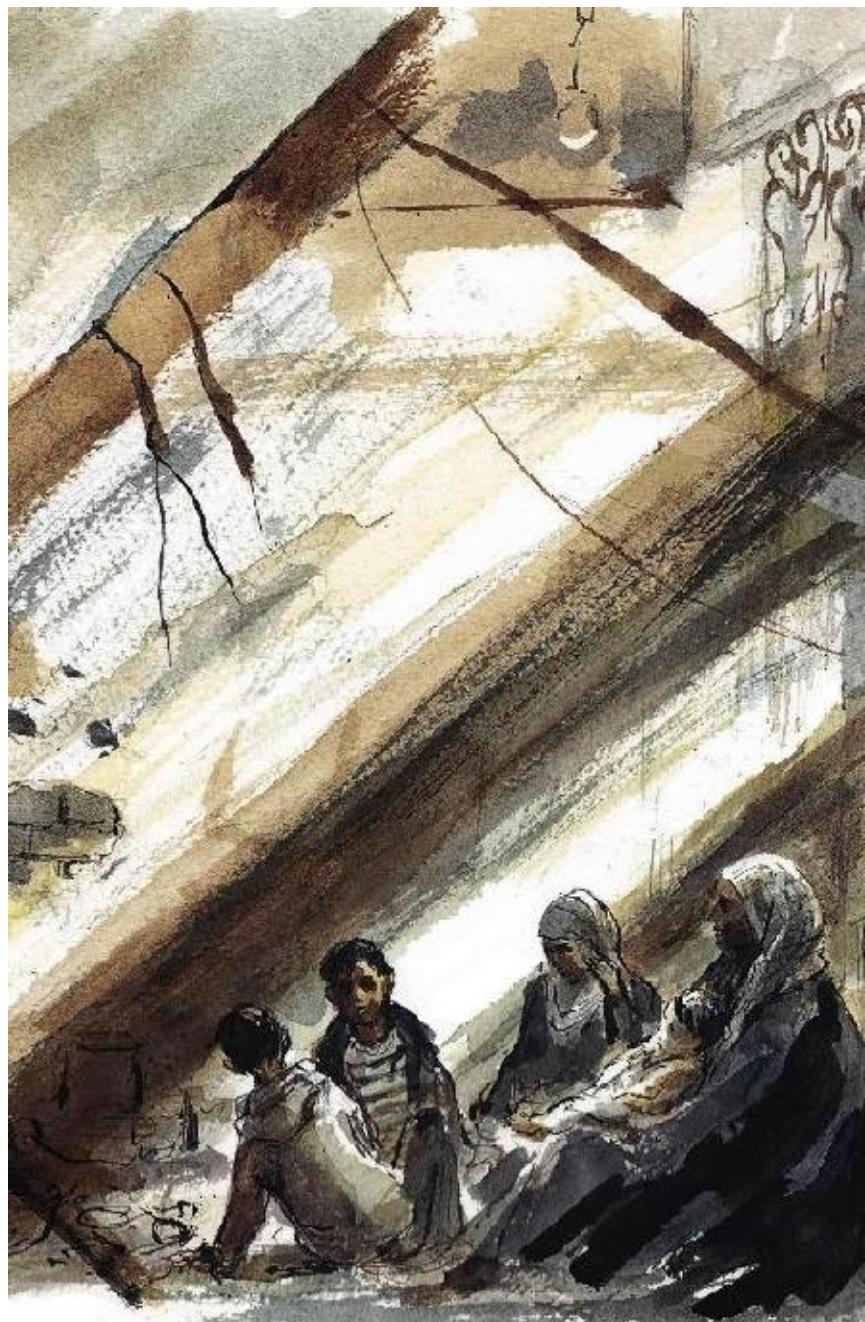




You know a bomb crater
can be made into a swimming hole.
You have learned
dark blood is better news than bright.



You have learned that mothers and sisters and classmates can be found in narrow gaps between concrete, bricks and exposed beams, little patches of sunlit skin shining in the dark.











Your mother is here tonight, Marwan, with us, on this cold and moonlit beach, among the crying babies and the women worrying in tongues we don't speak.

Afghans and Somalis and Iraqis and Eritreans and Syrians.

All of us impatient for sunrise, all of us in dread of it.

All of us in search of home.

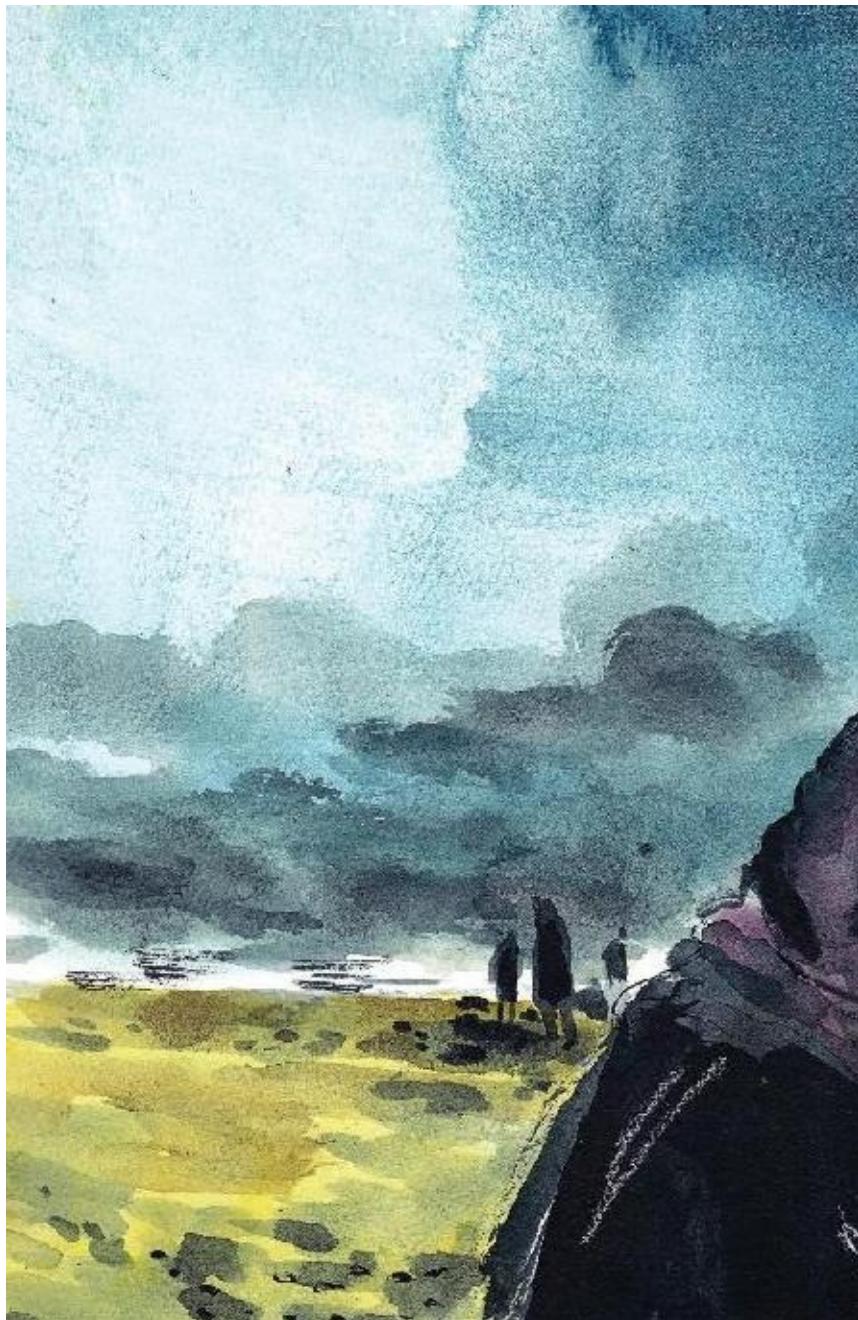
I have heard it said we are the uninvited.

We are the unwelcome.

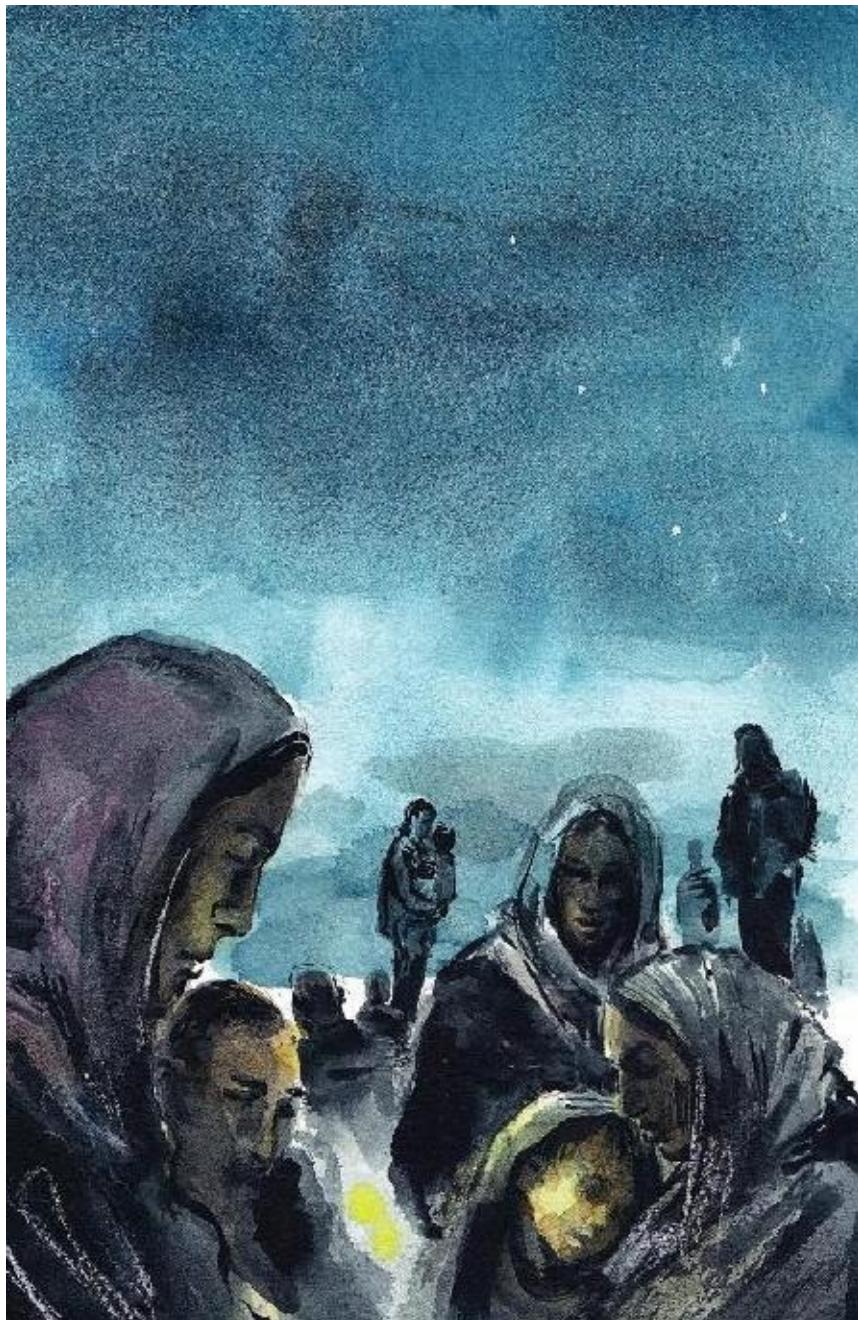
We should take our misfortune elsewhere.

But I hear your mother's voice, over the tide,
and she whispers in my ear, 'Oh, but if they saw, my darling.
Even half of what you have.
If only they saw.
They would say kinder things, surely.'

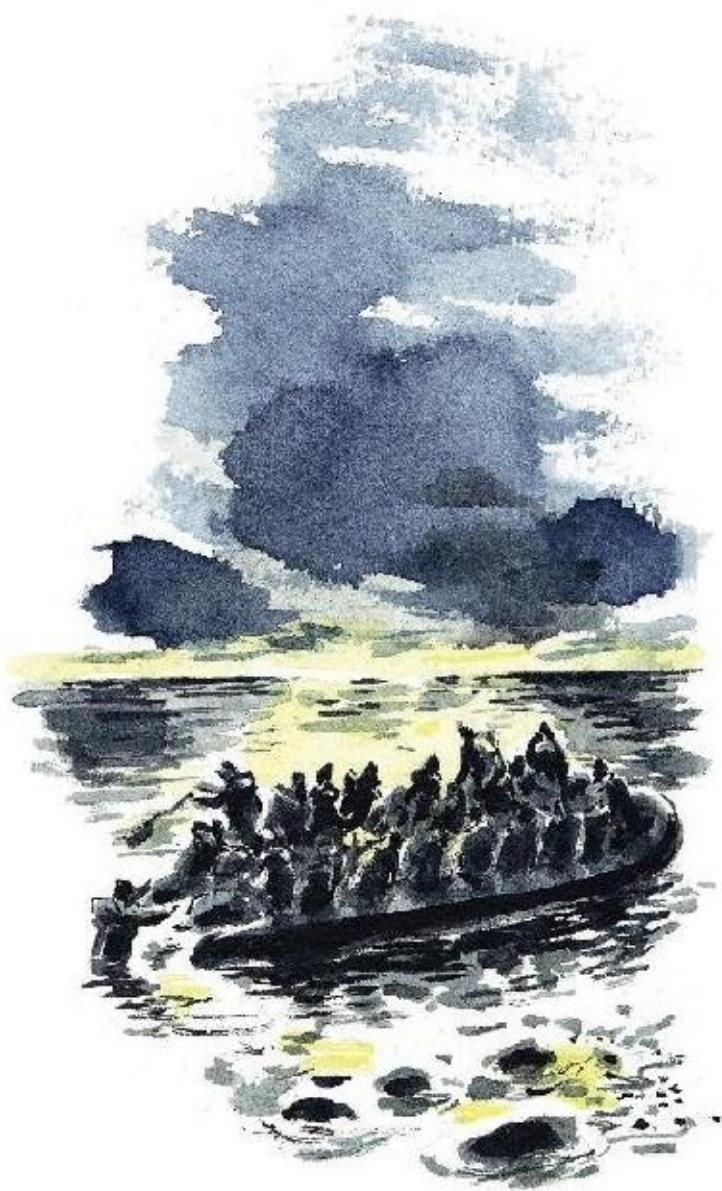


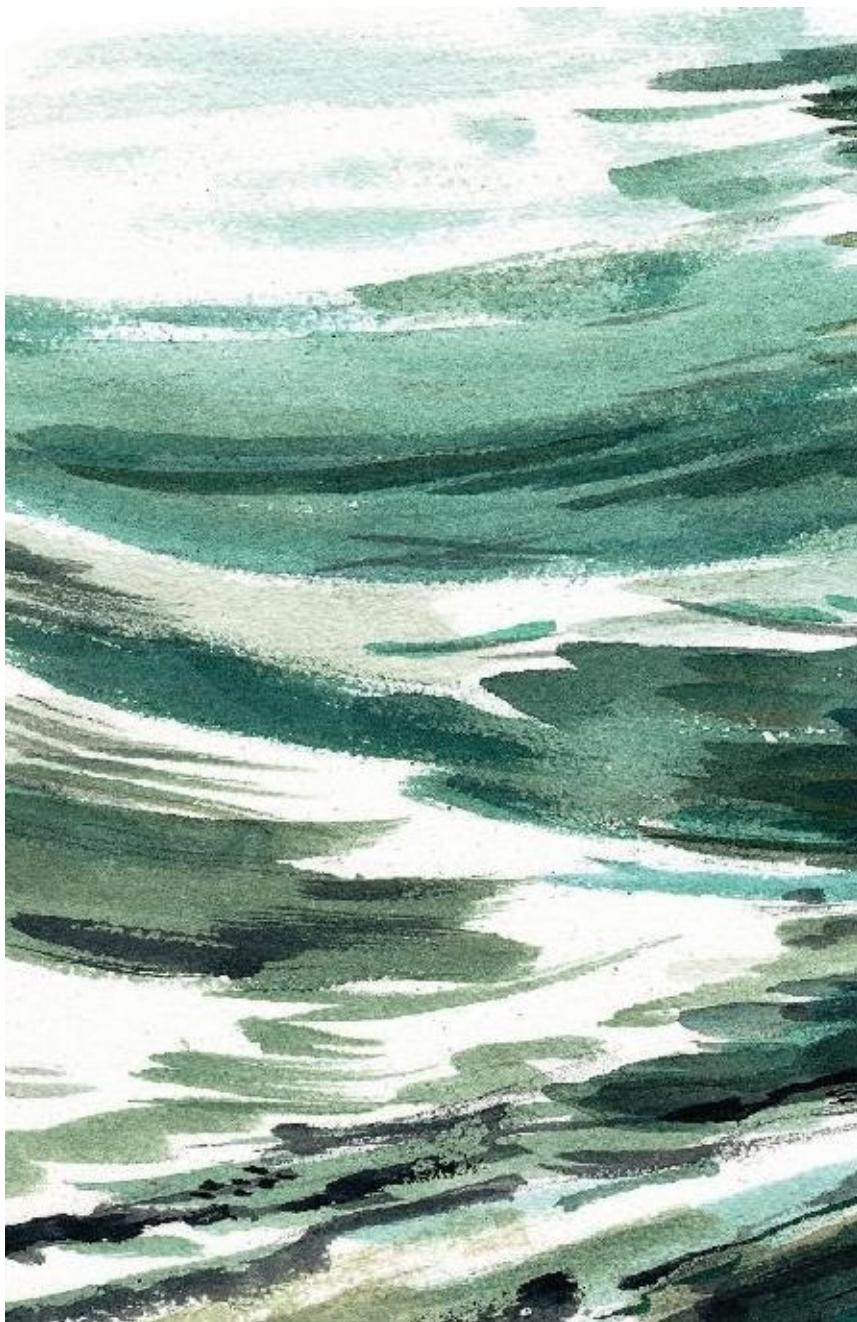


I look at your profile
in the glow of this three-quarter moon, my boy, your eyelashes like
calligraphy, closed in guileless sleep.
I said to you,
'Hold my hand.
Nothing bad will happen.'



These are only words.
A father's tricks.
It slays your father,
your faith in him.
Because all I can think tonight is how deep the sea,
and how vast, how indifferent.
How powerless I am to protect you from it.





All I can do is pray.

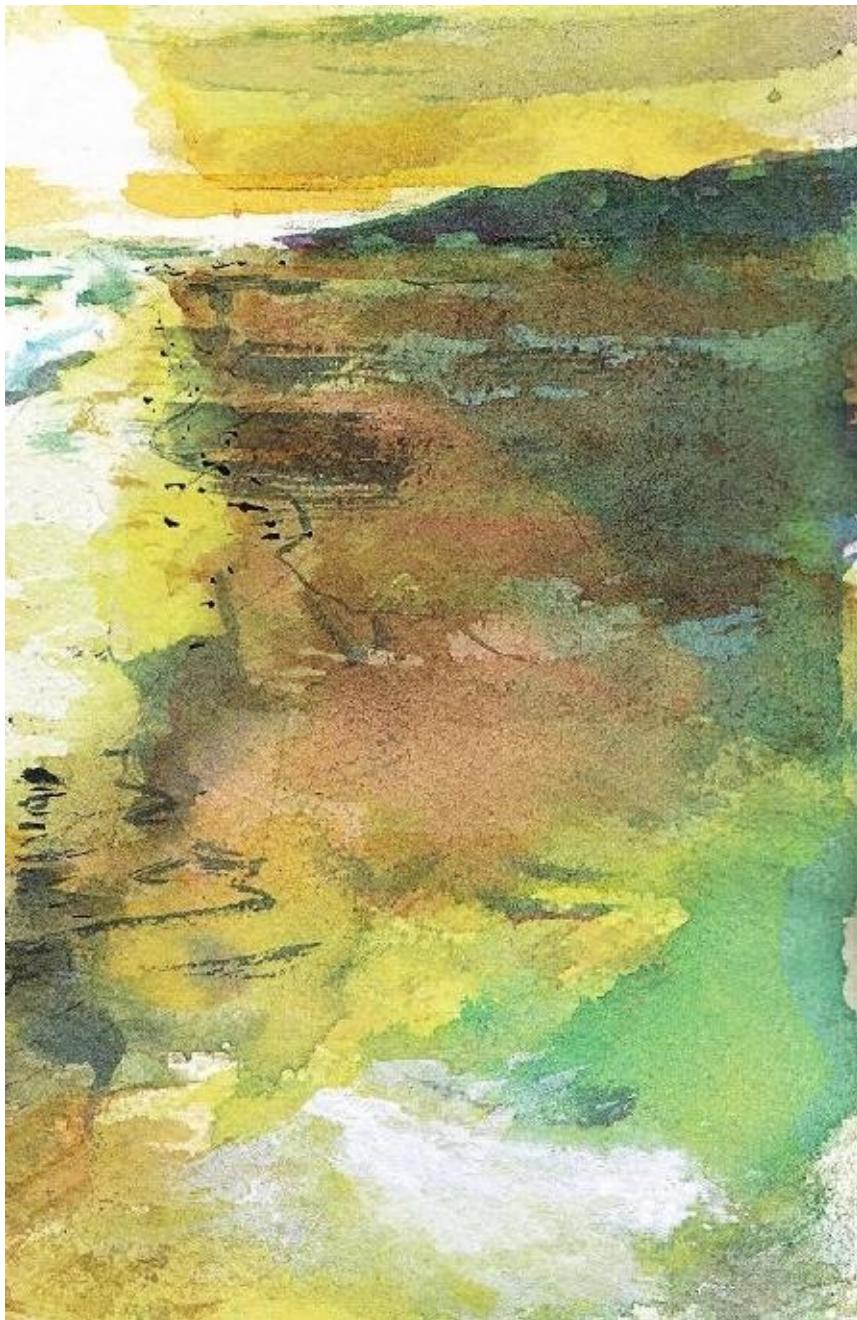




Pray God steers the vessel true, when the shores slip out of eyeshot and we
are a flyspeck
in the heaving waters, pitching and tilting, easily swallowed.
Because you,
you are precious cargo, Marwan, the most precious there ever was.
I pray the sea knows this.
Inshallah.







How I pray the sea knows this.

Sea Prayer was inspired by the story of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian refugee who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach safety in Europe in September 2015.

In the year after Alan's death 4,176 others died or went missing attempting similar journeys.
This book is dedicated to the thousands of refugees who have perished at sea

fleeing war and persecution.

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