

Chapter Three

ORANGES!

ON THEY WALKED. The sun was low down now and there was a strong smell of oranges coming from rows and rows of orange trees behind barbed wire fences. As far as they could see there were orange trees with dark green leaves and bright round fruit. Oranges were sweet and wonderful to taste and they didn't have them often.

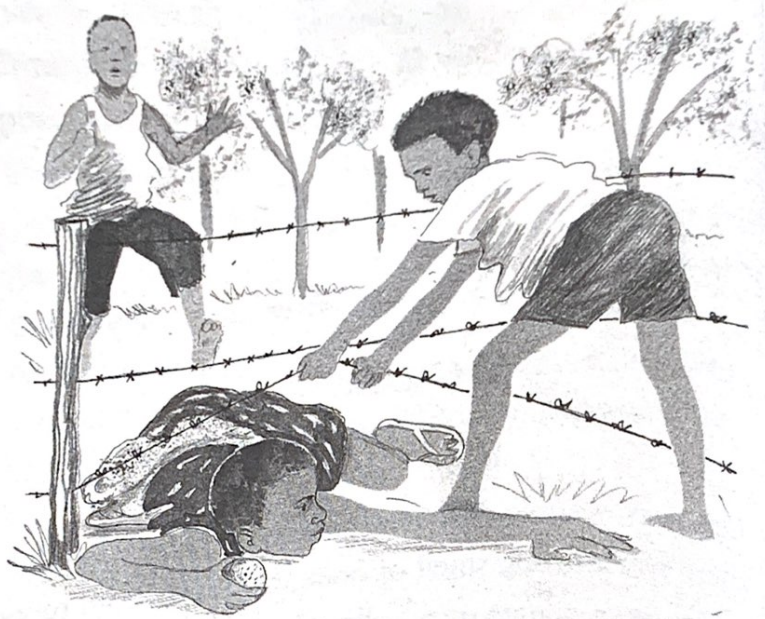
The children looked at each other.

"Do you think we could…" Tiro began.

But Naledi was already carefully pushing apart the barbed wire, edging her body through.

"Keep watch!" she ordered Tiro.

She was on tiptoes, stretching for an orange, when they heard, "HEY, YOU!"



Naledi dropped down, then dashed for the fence. Tiro was holding the wires for her. She tried to scramble through, but it was too late. A hand grasped her and pulled her back.

Naledi looked up and saw a young boy, her own age.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

He spoke in Tswana, their own language.

"The white farmer could kill you if he sees you. Don't you know he has a gun to shoot thieves?"

"We're not thieves. We've been walking all day and we're very hungry. Please don't call him," Naledi pleaded.

The boy looked more friendly now and asked where they came from.

So they told him about Dineo and how they were going to Johannesburg. The boy whistled.

"Phew. So far!"

He paused.

"Look. I know a place where you can sleep tonight and where the farmer won't find you. Stay here and I'll take you there when it's dark."

Naledi and Tiro glanced at each other, still a little nervous.

"Don't worry. You'll be safe waiting here. The farmer has gone inside for his supper," the boy reassured them. Then he grinned. "But if you eat oranges you must hide the peels well or there will be big trouble. We have to pick the fruit, but we're not allowed to eat it."

He turned and ran off, calling softly, "See you later."

"Can we stay here for the night?" Tiro asked.

Naledi wasn't too sure if they should.

"It can go badly if the farmer finds us. Remember what happened to Poleng's brother?"

When Poleng's brother had been caught taking a mielie[1], the poor boy had been whipped until he couldn't stand up any more.

Tiro bit his lip.

"But we can leave early in the morning before the farmer is up, can't we?"

"Well... I expect we must sleep somewhere, or we'll be too tired to walk tomorrow," Naledi agreed slowly.

So Tiro slipped through the barbed wire and together they picked some oranges. It seemed a bit safer now that it was getting darker. Four large oranges were enough for Naledi, but Tiro kept on picking and eating more.

"You'll be sick if you stuff yourself like that," warned his sister.

Still he took no notice, until suddenly he clutched his tummy.

"Ooooh!" he groaned.

Naledi just said, "What did I tell you? Come on, we must hide the peels."

With two sharp stones they began to dig a hole. Tiro made odd little grunts from the pain in his

[1] a corn on the cob

tummy, but he dug well even though the ground was hard and dry. After burying the peel and filling up the hole, they searched around for stones and dry leaves to cover over the freshly dug soil.

They sat close together, shivering a little from the night chill. Naledi had begun to wonder if the boy really would return, when they heard the sound of soft running footsteps. The shape in the dark was that of the boy worker.

"Come!" he beckoned, and began to lead the way through rows and rows of orange trees.

They stumbled along, hardly able to see, but at last they came to a shed.

"You'll be warm with the sacks," the boy said quietly as he let them in. Then, shyly, he took out a tin plate from under a sack. "I brought you a little pap[1]. I'm sorry but that's all we get here most days."

"Thank you, thank you," Tiro and Naledi whispered.

"*Sala sentle*,"[2] said the boy as he slipped away in the dark.

"*Tsamaya sentle*,"[3] came the reply from the shed.

[1] porridge made from corn-meal
[2] "Stay well": farewell greeting in Tswana
[3] "Go well": farewell greeting in Tswana



Chapter Four

RIDE ON A LORRY

TIRO WOKE WHEN he heard the rooster crow. The shed was already half light. He shook Naledi.

"Get up! We must hurry!"

As they crept out from the shed, they saw the farm buildings a little distance away, with thin smoke rising from the chimney.

Silently they ran through the long grass towards the orange trees. Then through the orange trees, row after row, until there at last was the barbed wire.

Finding the road again, they almost felt happy! The road was cool from the night and they sang as they walked.

The sun rose higher. On they walked. The heat sank

into them and they felt the sweat on their bodies. On they walked. Alone again, except for the odd flashing-by of a car or a truck.

SCREECH! Tyres skidded and stopped.

"Where are you two kids going?"

The driver of the lorry stuck a friendly face out of the window.

"To Johannesburg, Rra."[1]

"Are you crazy? That's more than 250 kilometres away!"

"We have to go," Naledi said simply, and explained.

"Well, well, that's something!" the driver muttered. "It will take you about a week to walk that far and your granny will be very worried. I should take you back home, but I'm late today already."

He paused to think. "Do you know where your mother works?"

Naledi nodded, pulling out the letter from her pocket.

"All right then. Hop on the back and I'll take you to Jo'burg. I'm taking the oranges there."

"Thank you, Rra!"

The children laughed. They pulled themselves up on to the lorry, wedging themselves against the sacks

[1] "father" in Tswana. The children are being polite to an older person

of oranges. So they were really on their way! And it was their first time on a lorry too!

The engine started up and the lorry was soon thundering along. Walking had been so quiet but travelling in a lorry was very noisy. The air which had been so hot and still before, now swept past their faces. The land which had stood still, now seemed to rush by.

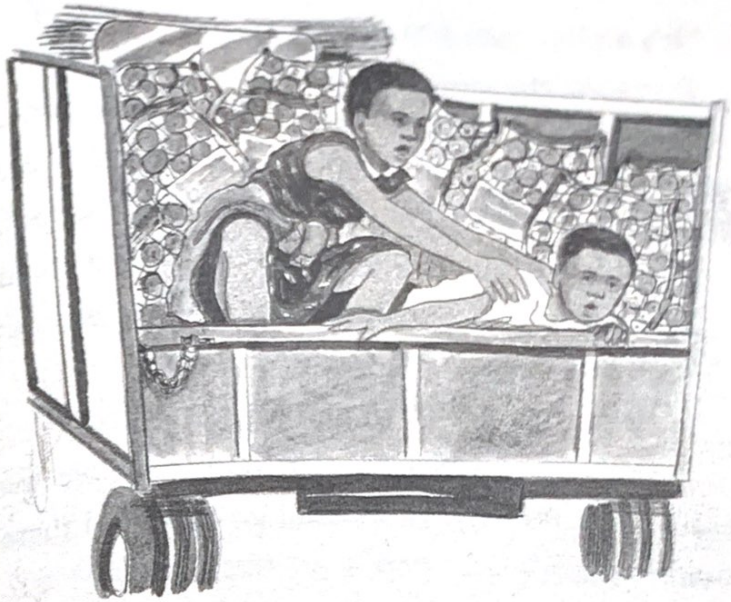
Thorn bushes, telegraph poles, wire fences, ploughed fields, cattle, rows of oranges, tall gum trees by a farm house... Almost as soon as they had seen something, it was gone.

Little by little, Tiro began to lean further out over the side to feel the wind on his face. Naledi called, "Sit back or you'll fall!" but her brother took no notice.

Suddenly the lorry went over a bump and Tiro jerked forwards. Naledi grabbed him just in time.

"Didn't I tell you?" she shouted over the noise of the lorry.

A little shaken, Tiro mumbled, "Sorry", and settled back properly against the orange sacks. Together they watched the road stretching far out behind them.



As the lorry sped on its way through the countryside, the children saw how the land was changing. Where they lived the land was almost flat, with few hills. Now for the first time, they were seeing proper mountains with steep rocks and crags. In some places it looked as if the road had been cut through the rock. Naledi was wondering how people could cut through rock, when Tiro asked her, "Where shall we find Mma in Jo'burg?"

His sister took the letter from her pocket and stared at the words at the top of the page.

"It's a place called 'Parktown'," she read slowly.

Tiro took the letter and studied the words too.

Naledi began to think of their mother and how, when Mma visited them, her first remarks were always about how they must work hard at school. When they had asked Mma why she worked so far away from home, her reply had been, "How else can I find the money to send you to school?"

But it was still very strange, thought Naledi.

Once she had asked Mma, "Why can't we live with you in the city? We could go to school there, couldn't we?"

Mma had seemed upset, but just said, "The white people who make the laws don't allow it. That's how it is."

But why not? Why not? thought Naledi.