

UNCLE ALI'S HOUSE STORY

PART 1

THE PERSECUTION

We live in Uncle Ali's house in the city. Uncle Ali is a very religious and learned man. He was once put in prison for his ideas. He was hurt and now he walks with a limp. Dad works for a newspaper and is a leader of the journalist's trade union – the local newspaper workers organisation. He drives an old car. Mum is at home with the baby. I am a girl of 10 who likes Maths and singing. My brother is 9. He plays football and likes chess. Granny has had to use a Zimmer frame since her stroke.

Last month the army took over our country in a military coup (that means that they kicked out the government and soldiers took over). Everything changed. We saw soldiers on the streets. We heard gunfire. People were taken away in trucks. The army made a curfew: everybody has to stay indoors from 9pm. They have taken over the TV and radio and play military music a day. It is hard to find out what is happening. Some trade unions, including Dad's, have now been banned. In town some religious leaders have mysteriously 'gone missing'. Three of Dad's mates at work have 'disappeared'. People say the army took them away. Where can they be? Nobody knows.

A poster was stuck on the fence near our house. On the top it said: 'The Enemy Within'. Underneath was a list of names including Dad's and Uncle Ali's. At the bottom was a picture of a skull and a Kalashnikov gun. It was signed Friends of the Motherland. Who are they? Nobody knows. Mum tore the poster down.

Last week soldiers came to our school looking for the husband of our dinner lady. He wasn't there. So they dragged her away with two of her children and she was shouting: 'But we haven't done anything!' Yesterday my brother heard the letterbox rattle. He ran downstairs in his pyjamas. He found a crumpled card on the floor with a message made of letters and words cut out of a newspaper and glued on. It said: 'Tonight's the night. Enemy scum you are dead'. It was signed Friends of the Motherland.

My brother ran out into the street but nobody was there. Who are these scary people? What does this mean? Today our phone rang. Uncle Ali picked it up. A voice said that the place where Ali prays was on fire. 'And they are going to bomb your house too. Get out.' Then the phone went dead.

BANG! We hear explosions. Army tanks are in the Town Square. Every road out of town is closed with barbed wire and a military checkpoint. Soldiers are searching traffic. The station is shut. Oh no! They are raiding houses and arresting people. Dad says we are in danger. What should we do now?

Uncle Ali wonders if we could escape over the border to the neighbouring country and seek asylum there as refugees. But its five days walk away through the hot desert and over the mountains. Mum says it will be dangerous. But won't it be even more dangerous if we stay? And what should we take with us?

Task 1

Your task is to decide who should go and who should stay (if anyone). You should consider: who are the most vulnerable? Who will find it difficult to travel and who might slow the group down? What might happen to anyone left behind? Write out your decision and explain why.

Part 2

THE DECISION

Actually my family decides that everyone will go. We will have to travel on foot, often at night, over the desert across dangerous country and up over the cold mountains to get to the frontier. Will we ever make it? Granny reminds us that we have to carry everything that we'll need with us. We must only pack the basic essentials and important bits and pieces that we need to survive the long journey and to get across the border safely and become refugees. Granny says that she can hear the army coming up the street already. Quick! Hurry!

Task 2

Your task is to decide what they should take with them. Make a list of 10 essential things that the family must pack for their journey and to get them across the border.

Part 3

CLAIMING ASYLUM

After an exhausting and terrifying journey we all reached the frontier, tired, hungry and scared but alive. The baby was ill. Granny was crying. But we got there. Then we met the Immigration Officer and the guards. We tried to tell them that we wanted to become refugees in their country because we were in danger in our country. But they didn't believe us.

They said: 'Prove your story is true. Maybe you made it all up?' They opened our bags. They made us fill in forms that we didn't understand. Will they let us stay?

We are asked:

- Why have you come to this country?
- Are you looking for a new job?
- Are you trying to move here because we have good health care and good schools?

If the groups tell you that they are escaping from persecution, ask them:

- What proof do you have that you are escaping from persecution?
 - What is in your bags?
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Task 3

Examine your list of 10 things. Do they have any evidence to prove that they are telling the truth about being in danger? Have they brought with them the 'Enemy Within' poster or the death threat? On the other hand, did they include a weapon or a knife which the immigration officer might think makes them dangerous? Write down whether you think any of their items might help or hinder their claim for asylum.
