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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham', with a stylized, flowing script.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM

Publisher

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NISHA'S WAR

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For Dad. We miss you.

*Barrow Island
haunts me.*

*I think it always
will. No matter where
I go, whatever I do,
a part of me will
always stay behind
on Barrow Island.*

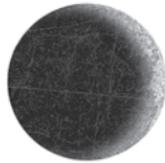




MARCH 1942



NINE DAYS UNTIL FULL MOON



I

R E F U G E E S

The train crawled into Bealmouth and groaned to a halt. There was no clatter of doors as passengers disembarked from dark and lonely carriages. There was no quiet bustle of relatives meeting, or of young soldiers uttering last farewells.

Here, on a grey spring evening, only one door opened at that desolate station. Only two wretched figures stepped down on to the platform. A broken-hearted woman and her thirteen-year-old daughter. Ragged and exhausted, they were hardly more than skin and bone. Travellers from another time and place.

They stood in the steam like ghosts in the fog.

Both Mother and Daughter flinched when the guard's whistle screamed loud and shrill. They huddled together as the train huffed and puffed, and dragged itself away into the cold.

And then there was only the wind.

They had nothing with them but the clothes they wore. Mother's colourful sari was long gone. Daughter's favourite dress was a distant memory. Instead, Mother wore thick woollen trousers given to her on the ship, and a stout pair of men's shoes that gaped around her thin ankles. Daughter wore pink pyjamas donated by a kind lady with sad eyes at Glasgow station. A threadbare coat hardly kept the wind from chilling her bones, and a pair of someone else's shoes pinched her bare toes.

As she looked along the empty platform, Daughter put a hand in her pocket and closed her fist around the small red stone she had carried from the other side of the world. It was her little piece of home. Whenever she looked at it, she was reminded of sunshine and colour and sweetness.

Now, though, everything was grey.

The platform was grey. The small stone station house was grey. The sky was grey. Even the air was grey.

And although it was March, she could see her warm breath in the cold air. Like steam from a train.

'They should be expecting us,' Mother said into the silence.

She was a shadow of what she had been just ten weeks ago. Life on board the ship had been cruel, and now Mother's skin was stretched tight around her cheekbones. Her eyes were sunken and bloodshot. Her black hair had lost its shine. But what bothered Daughter most of all was that Mother hadn't stopped shivering since they boarded the train at Glasgow.

'Come along,' Mother smiled as best as she could.

Without another word, the two refugees made their way along the platform towards the station exit.

Outside, a narrow lane stretched in both directions. It was lined with tall hedges and lonely trees. There was no sign of life except for the hungry sparrows flitting among the leafless branches.

'Perhaps we could walk.' Mother looked both ways along the lane. 'Which way do you think it is?'

Before Daughter could reply, a dusky blur of crows rose above the trees in the distance. They scattered into the air caw-cawing and circling like dark spirits in the grey sky. When they settled, there came a strange and gentle clip-clopping sound.

The clip-clopping persisted, growing louder, as if the Devil himself were dancing in the mist.

Mother and Daughter waited with unease until finally a dark brown pony appeared around the corner of the lane, pulling a small trap. The trap wasn't anything special – just a rickety seat attached to a pair of large

wheels. A man sat upon it, wrapped in a heavy overcoat.
A flat cap was pulled low over his brow.

‘Do you think he’s here for us?’ Mother whispered.