

Chapter 8

Back in Time

Chapter 1

Vicky looked at the monitor in the Istanbul departure lounge. The flight to Manchester was delayed. Then she noticed that there was a flight to Addis Ababa due to take off in fifteen minutes. I made sure she read it again then put the idea in her head.

“Go on.” I encouraged her. “Here’s your chance. You know you want to go and meet Teddy and this is probably the only opportunity that you’ll ever get to see that mobile phone.”

Vicky put a finger to her mouth as she considered the consequences of such an action. She knew it would be wrong but her conscience was easily overcome. This was fate. Little did we realise then how it would change her life and what an impact it could have on her future - and my past.

“No. You’d better not,” I told her. “You know it would be wrong. You could get caught and just think of the trouble you’d get into. And what about your mum and dad? They’d be terribly worried. Anyway, your luggage has already gone through the check in desk so you’ve only got that small bag and the present dad’s just given you.”

Vicky looked round the departure lounge to see if anyone else was watching her. As she hesitated I changed her mind again. “Look Vicky, your plane’s delayed at least half an hour. That means you’re going to get home later than expected. You can ring your mum from the airport in Addis Ababa and tell her you got on the wrong plane by mistake. That would give you time to find Teddy (if he really exists) and then catch another flight back to Manchester and no one would ever know it was deliberate – except us of course.”

She made her mind up then and walked fairly confidently down the long corridor to the departure gate where a crowd of people were beginning to queue to get on the flight to Addis Ababa. Her self-confidence suddenly disappeared.

“We may have a bit of a problem here,” I said. “Why not wear that scarf dad’s given you? Wrap it round your head like that woman over there. That will hide most of your face. Now, if you tag along with one of those large families, you could sneak through.”

She hesitated and, just when I was about to suggest she forget that idea and go back to the main departure lounge and wait for the flight home, she tore open the fancy bag and pulled out the pink pashmina. Wrapping it round her head and shoulders, as she’d seen many women in Turkey do, she waited nervously in the final departure lounge until the time came to board. She glanced round the waiting passengers then joined a group of tired children who were arguing while their parents tried to find the boarding passes for each member of the family. One sleeping child was being carried by the father while the mother held a screaming baby in her arms and struggled to find something in her handbag. The three older children each carried bags and trailed their coats. As one child’s plastic bag burst open, and the contents of books, pens, toys and gifts spilled onto the floor, Vicky quickly bent down to help pick the items up.

In all the confusion, the airport staff and parents didn’t notice her slip past the desk holding the child’s hand and she was soon walking quickly down the tunnel to the entrance and the queue waiting to board the aircraft, staying close to the family. As the steward dealt with their enquiries, Vicky passed them and walked on up the first aisle to the far end of the plane then hid in the narrow gap behind the last seat.

We couldn't believe how easy it had been. On her flight to Turkey she had shown her tickets to at least two people before she even got onto the plane.

"We'll be safe here till the plane takes off," I reassured her. "Then you can wander back down the aisle to see if there are any spare seats. You're not going to be thrown off now."

"This is wrong," Vicky said to herself.

"Yes," I agreed. "Oh you are so bad." I added, knowing she wouldn't change her mind at this stage.

You're probably wondering who I am. Well I'm what you might call Vicky's inner voice. Everyone's got one. Some people might call us their 'soul' but I think that only fits when we're suggesting nice things like helping people and doing as you're told. We sometimes (quite often in fact) recommend doing something which may be wrong, even bad. If the person isn't strong willed, and the outcome seems attractive, they take that advice and then have to deal with the consequences.

My last body was a man who loved food. I had no problem suggesting to him that he eat another cake or biscuit or put more on his plate than he needed. I would tell him he was too tired to exercise so he got very fat and didn't live to old age. Then it was time for me to move on to a new person. Vicky's young, fit and healthy but she's got her weaknesses, like her temper, and she can be stubborn and doesn't know how to occupy herself. Her favourite expression is, 'I'm bored.' That's how she came to discover Teddy – but more about that later.

One thing I could guarantee about Vicky was her determination to see something through when she'd set her mind on it. For example, she had encouraged her father to buy those shoes she's wearing. She thought they made her look so grown up even though she'd only just turned thirteen.

Vicky only saw him once a year, usually at Easter when she visited his hotel in Turkey, and he always wanted to spoil her while she was there. When he'd met her mother he was only a waiter in the hotel where she was staying but, in the last twelve years he'd worked his way up and was now the manager. He wasn't rich but he was no longer hard up so he could pay for Vicky to fly out from Manchester, as long as her mother made the arrangements for travel from her home. Her mother doted on Vicky, her only child, but she couldn't afford luxuries like holidays in the Mediterranean so she always agreed to Vicky visiting her dad each year. This was the first time she'd allowed her to go unsupervised.

“What do you think she'll do when you don't turn up at the airport?” I asked Vicky. “She'll be really worried.” Vicky briefly considered that but the alternative was too tempting and it was too late to turn back now.

As soon as the plane was in the air and the stewards were busy in the galley, Vicky crept out from her hiding place and wandered down the aisle. The plane was half empty and most people were tired and trying to get to sleep so no one took any notice of a young girl wandering along the aisle. She found a row of seats that were unoccupied and settled down, hiding herself under the blue airline blanket. The stewards wandered past but took no notice and eventually she fell asleep, despite my suggestions.

Inner voices are at their most active late at night when people want to sleep. We don't have any competition then – no teachers or parents trying to influence the children, no

husbands or wives giving their advice – so we try to make up for lost time by filling peoples' heads with all sorts of ideas. That's why some people can't sleep. There are those who take advantage of these thoughts – particularly authors looking for inspiration – but most block us out of their mind and we rest while they dream. Then there are those who listen to us all night; they claim they are insomniacs, take sleeping tablets, do meditation or seek medical help. Vicky is still young enough to control me when she's had enough.

I've been around for centuries. I remember some of the people, particularly those who lived a long time. One woman, I think she was Japanese, lived to be a hundred. I got bored in her last twenty years and kept suggesting she was ill but she refused to listen to me.

Vicky is an interesting person to be with. She's got a good idea of what is right and wrong but she's still prepared to take some risks and be adventurous. She wouldn't want to hurt anyone but she's quite selfish so I can tell her to do things other children would refuse to consider. I think it's partly due to her upbringing. When her mother discovered she was pregnant, after the holiday in Turkey, she swore she'd give the child everything she wanted. So, ever since Vicky was born she's been well looked after but she has got used to having her own way. She knows the limits; her mum's never going to be able to afford to buy her a horse or expensive holidays but that hasn't stopped Vicky trying to impress her friends at school with her stories of their 'house in the country' and their 'yacht in the Mediterranean'. She's good at telling tales.

Hours later the lights in the cabin came on and the captain's voice said, "We are about to land in Addis Ababa; fasten your seatbelts." Vicky sat up and did as she was told. The next part of her journey was going to be quite an adventure. She recalled the dream she'd just had about meeting up with Teddy and seeing his uncle's mobile phone. She leaned back in her seat and let me plan her next move.

Chapter 2

The immigration hall at Addis Ababa airport was chaotic. People were queuing for visas or waiting in rows leading to cubicles where officials were taking each person's passport and other paperwork and scrutinising the documents carefully before giving them a purple stamp and permission to enter Ethiopia.

Vicky looked round, bewildered by the situation and not sure what she should do next. I gave her a few suggestions like, "Why not try fainting or bursting into tears?" Both tactics would draw attention to her and she would be taken care of quickly. However, Vicky spotted an easier option that would avoid any conflict. She was small enough to sneak through with that large family who had helped her get onto the plane. They all stood at one exit cubicle as the official scratched his head and looked at a computer screen. Then one of the youngsters started crying. Vicky joined the end of their line, bending down to help the tired child who struggled to put his coat on. Then she followed them through as the man in uniform stamped their passports and impatiently waved them on.

They parted in the big hall where items of luggage from previous flights still rode around the carousels and other cases and boxes were heaped, unwanted, at the far end of the room. Staff and passengers took no notice of her as she looked round, trying to locate the way out. When she walked out of the baggage hall into the arrivals lounge she was faced by a queue of faces searching for the passengers who had landed with her.

"Stay calm," I told her. "We'll find a phone or someone who can help."

Vicky walked across the arrivals area, a huge hall which, at this early hour of the morning, was quiet with a few people stood by a coffee stall and taxi drivers waiting for their

passengers to arrive. She was feeling apprehensive, ready to give herself up to anyone in authority, when she was approached by a hotel representative.

“Hilton Hotel!” he said in recognisable English. “Do you need the courtesy bus?”

Vicky looked at him, surprised that she could understand him.

“Take it,” I advised her. “At least there will be someone there who can understand you and you won’t be put back on the next flight to Turkey or Manchester.”

Vicky didn’t hesitate. “Yes. I haven’t any money though,” she admitted.

“Where are your family?” he enquired.

“They are coming on a later flight,” she lied.

“Do not worry. We will charge it to their bill at the hotel,” he replied with a smile.

“The worst that can happen is that they send the bill to your mum or dad. You’re too young to be sent to prison,” I said to reassure her. Vicky followed the driver and a few other passengers outside to the waiting minibus in a vast car park on the edge of the city. It was quite cold outside the terminal building, certainly much colder than it had been in Turkey. She climbed into the vehicle and sat near the back then, with their luggage stowed behind her, the others joined her and they were driven towards the city centre.

Although the streets were lit, there was very little traffic – hardly surprising since it was only four o’ clock in the morning. While we passed hotels, shops, churches and other buildings, interspersed with what looked like corrugated iron shacks and open spaces, I gave her more advice. “Now when you get there ask to see the manager and admit that you haven’t got a room booked and your parents aren’t coming. Tell him the truth – well our version of it

– that you mistakenly got on the wrong plane and got scared. He'll probably call your mum or dad. Tell him you know someone in Addis Ababa who may be able to help until you get a flight home. You remember his name, Teddy, but don't know his address. Now try to remember what he told you. What was his second name or his uncle's name? Have you got any other information?"

Vicky thought back to that day when she had seen Teddy. It was only three weeks earlier at the end of Spring Term, just before the Easter holidays. Vicky had been bored. School was boring and citizenship was the most boring lesson as far as Vicky was concerned. She had been told to read about a developing nation such as an African country and write a small project which would be handed in after Easter.

"Why?" she had asked her teacher.

"Because it's part of the course."

"Well, which country should I study?"

"Whichever one interests you."

"I'm not interested in any country. They're all boring."

"Vicky. Go and look for information on an African country on the computer," her teacher had insisted and sent her to the back of the library.

Vicky liked using the internet to find out about famous TV and music celebrities so she agreed. She typed 'Africa' into the search engine and within seconds it had found 306 million sites. There was no way she was going to look at them all so she clicked on the first site and a map of all the African countries appeared. She had never heard of most of them. She thought this was going to be just as boring as reading the text books.

Then, as she stared at the screen she noticed that a dark face kept appearing in one country. At first it was very small and faint. She thought she saw it move, then it disappeared. She moved the mouse till the arrow sat on that country – Ethiopia. She had never heard of Ethiopia. The face suddenly appeared again and it was moving. The eyes shifted and the lips parted into a smile.

At that precise moment in his uncle's study in Addis Ababa, Teddy had been holding a mobile phone in front of him and taking photographs of himself. He'd never used a mobile phone with a camera before – his father's phone was very basic and could only be used for phone calls and text messages. Uncle Daniel's phone was much more modern with lots of different keys and functions.

Teddy looked at his picture on the small screen. Then he found a button which made a movie image. Holding down the button he started to move his head from side to side and laughed revealing his white front teeth with a gap between them. Then he played back the image but this time, when it stopped, he noticed another face on the screen. It was a girl with light brown skin, dark brown eyes and long straight black hair. He looked at the screen in astonishment. It wasn't anyone he recognised.

Vicky kept the arrow on 'Ethiopia' and clicked the enter button on the computer. Suddenly she found herself looking at the boy's face which now filled the screen. He had been laughing but then he stopped and looked shocked. She started laughing, thinking to herself that maybe this wasn't such a boring site.

The boy seemed to say something but she couldn't understand it. She shook her head and continued giggling. Then he spoke in English, "Who are you? Why are you laughing?"

Vicky stopped, surprised that the boy on the computer actually appeared to see and hear her. "Are you talking to me?"

"Who are you? Where are you?" the boy asked. He appeared quite distraught.

"I'm Vicky. I'm in school, in Manchester. Who are you?"

"Teddy. Teddy Tadesse."

"Where are you?"

"In my Uncle Daniel's office - in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia."

"I've got to study an African country. What can you tell me about Ethiopia?"

"Many things - but I don't think my uncle would be happy if he knew I was telephoning you."

"I'm not on the phone. I'm on the computer."

"What are you doing?"

"Well, I'm supposed to be learning about another country. So, can you help me?"

"How?"

"Well can you tell me a bit about Ethiopia? Show me some pictures of your country and describe them then I can show my teacher that I've been doing some research."

That was how she discovered Teddy. By the time she'd recalled this, the car had reached the front gates of a huge hotel in large gardens. It was much bigger than her dad's hotel and she began to feel nervous.

“Don’t worry,” I told her. “Soon you’ll meet Teddy again and then you’ll be able to see his uncle and that amazing mobile phone.”

Vicky climbed out of the minibus and thanked the driver. Then she entered the wide glass doors and was confronted by a tall man in a uniform standing beside an x-ray machine. “Put your bag on there,” he ordered. Vicky lifted her small bag onto the moving rubber mat and watched it vanish through the machine. “Okay,” he said, more kindly, giving her back her bag. “Where is your family?”

“This may be a good moment to burst into tears and get some sympathy,” I suggested. Vicky didn’t need much encouragement. She was already sniffing and tears filled her eyes as she looked up into the kind brown eyes.

“I’ve lost them,” she blubbed. “I got on the wrong plane and now I don’t know where I am.”

“Ask to see the manager,” I told her.

“May I see the manager,” she quietly asked, wiping her nose on the new scarf.

“I think that can be arranged.” the man agreed adding under his breath, “but I don’t think he’ll be pleased to be woken in the middle of the night. Why don’t you come and sit in the lounge. I’ll get you something to drink.”

Vicky smiled and followed him, clutching her bag. She tried to stop listening to me telling her what she should do next. I tried cheering her up one minute, and then the next minute I was telling her off for being such a bad girl. I’m good at that. When the manager arrived half an hour later he found Vicky, on one of the sofas with her eyes closed. He spoke quietly to the guard then disappeared to his office, leaving Vicky to eventually fall asleep.

Chapter 3

Before she went to sleep, Vicky tried to remember everything she could about Teddy. They had both been astonished when they realised that Vicky could see the same images he pointed to with the mobile phone. She had urged him to share some information with her and he realised that he could show her more of his country from the pictures in his uncle's many books on Ethiopia. She now remembered some of the images she'd seen on the school computer screen on that day.

The first picture was of a desert. "This is in the east of our country. Here is where early humans were discovered. Their bones were found by archaeologists. Ethiopia was known as the 'cradle of civilisation'," he told her slowly, trying to use correct English. As Teddy pointed the mobile phone camera at each picture he took Vicky on a voyage of discovery, travelling back through space and time to see where Lucy, the earliest human, had been discovered.

"This is incredible," Vicky said. "Can we go somewhere else?"

He quickly turned the page and found a photograph of huge stone carved pillars in a place called Axum, in the north of Ethiopia.

"This was a city - centre of a great civilization - two thousand years old. The Queen of Sheba lived here too - a thousand years before Christ. It is where the Ark of the Covenant is."

"What's the Ark of the Covenant?" Vicky asked.

"King Solomon lived in Jerusalem - about three thousand years ago - and he looked after the Ark of the Covenant - it held the Ten Commandments."

“The same ones that Moses was given?” Vicky remembered learning about that in junior school.

“Yes. Now it is in Ethiopia.”

She didn’t remember learning that. “What else can you show me?”

Teddy turned the pages of the book and found a photograph of a building carved out of rock. “Here is a famous religious place - Lalibela.”

“You have a lot of church stuff, don’t you?” Vicky commented, starting to lose interest.

“We do. Ethiopia was the first Christian country in Africa. Lalibela is very special. People come from all over the world to see this.” Teddy had pointed the mobile phone at one image of a church carved out of solid red rock.

Even Vicky couldn’t believe what she saw. “How did they do that?” she had asked, looking at the walls, doors and windows all carved out of a solid block of stone.

“No one knows. Some say angels did it.” Teddy found more pictures of churches and religious festivals.

“Wow. Your country must be really peaceful.”

“Not always.” Teddy told Vicky about the battles for power and the problems that his country faced. As he turned the pages of the book he told her about the famines and the poverty. “That was when the rest of the world heard about Ethiopia. People saw pictures of starving children and wanted to help.”

“I’m sorry. Do you think things will get better?”

“I hope so. We have a beautiful country.”

“I want to visit it.”

“You must come. I will write down our telephone number for you. It is 0112 393205.”

Then the screen started to dim.

“I can’t see anything.” Vicky complained.

“I think the battery died. I must stop.”

“Oh no! I wish I could see more.”

“You must come and visit me and my country.” Teddy had said.

“How can I do that?”

“You’ll find a way. Remember 0112 393205. I have to go now. Good bye.”

“Please don’t go,” Vicky had called, but it was too late.

The screen had gone blank.

Vicky had quickly written down his number and everything she could remember then went back to her desk to start her project. She was even motivated enough to look for some books on Ethiopia and asked her teacher where she could find them.

“Goodness me Vicky, you’re enthusiastic all of a sudden. What’s got into you?”

“I just want to know more about Ethiopia, miss.”

She worked quite hard after that lesson, finding out more about some of the places and people that Teddy had introduced her to and writing about them with pictures she found from the internet and in library books.

Chapter 4

“So you are lost?” the manager asked Vicky. He was a very tall bearded man in a dark suit and he had an angry look on his face when she was shown into his office.

“Don’t let him upset you,” I told her. “He’s bound to soften if you’re polite and tell him you’re frightened.” Vicky took a deep breath and started to tell the manager everything that had happened. Well nearly everything. She didn’t tell him she’d deliberately got on the wrong plane. That would have been stupid and she was in enough trouble already.

“I will telephone your father and leave a message at Manchester airport but I will also have to inform the British Embassy. You have no visa so you are an illegal immigrant,” he said sternly.

If she wasn’t scared already, this last fact really worried her. She’d seen on TV the way that such people were treated in her own country. She waited for her inner voice to reassure her but I kept quiet. I’d nothing to say that would help. I’d already said too much and got her into this situation. Then the manager’s features began to soften and he smiled at her.

“Now you’re not to worry. We will sort this out. I will try to find out who this ‘Teddy’ is and see if I can contact his father or uncle. Have you told me everything you know about your friend?”

“I’ve got his telephone number. I keep it in my purse.”

“That will be very useful. It’s not that easy to find people in our country. However, I will see what I can do. Meanwhile you must stay here in the hotel. Would you prefer to stay in my office or can I trust you to stay in the lounge?”

“I promise I’ll stay in the lounge.”

“Good. I’ll get my assistant to bring you some food and a drink. You must be hungry after all that travel.”

“This sounds good,” I told Vicky. As a well brought up girl, Vicky knew how she should behave and the staff seemed happy to help her. After settling in the lounge she was given a book to read, a plate of cake and a bottle of fizzy drink. All she had to do was sit and wait to hear the outcome of the phone calls that the manager was making. I tried to convince her that everything was going to be fine while making her aware that things might still not go to plan. They may never locate Teddy. He might not even exist.

Vicky watched the people wandering through the lounge and wondered where they had come from. There were all kinds of nationalities wearing different types of clothes. Some wore long flowing robes and matching headgear while many wore western dress or casual clothes. When she looked out to the gardens it was bright sunshine and she was eager to get out of the hotel. She was looking at a guide book for the country which had photographs of many of the places Teddy had introduced her to when the manager reappeared.

“We have good news for you,” he announced, smiling at Vicky. “I have managed to get a message to your mother to say you are safe and I have located Ato Daniel, your friend’s uncle. He is a well-known scientist from the university in Addis Ababa and he does have a nephew called Teddy.”

“So he really does exist,” Vicky exclaimed in relief.

“Yes Ato Daniel is going to come later, with Teddy and his father. Oh, he has some questions for you,” the manager added, shaking his head.

“I bet he has,” I murmured to Vicky. “Your arrival here could get Teddy into big trouble.”

“I have also spoken to the British Embassy and they will need to interview you. I cannot get your father – he is not answering his mobile phone.”

“He’s probably working,” Vicky answered. “He’s also a hotel manager so he’s very busy.”

“Really. Well he must be a busy man but I will keep trying. Meanwhile are you okay?”

“Yes thank you. Can I go into the garden until the people arrive?”

“Of course. You are our guest.”

As the manager disappeared round the corner, I told Vicky she was going to be okay. As she wandered out into the early morning sunlit gardens, I helped her to plan what she would say when questioned. By the time the British Embassy official arrived she was prepared.

“Well young lady, you’ve been very lucky. If you hadn’t been brought here, you could have been lost forever,” the woman said. “Now we need to arrange for a temporary visa and a flight back to England.”

Vicky acted shy and grateful, giving the impression she was very upset at the mistake she’d made and wanted to get home to her mother. When the next visitors arrived, however, she behaved completely differently. When she saw the boy, who was about her own age, accompanied by two men, one tall and thin, the other short and plump, she felt excited. She

recognised the face she had seen on her school's computer monitor. Meeting Teddy in person and seeing his family confirmed her decision to try and stay in Ethiopia a bit longer.

“Vicky. It is so good to see you. I recognised you immediately,” Teddy cried, running across the lounge towards her and sitting next to her on the huge sofa. I told Vicky it was possibly due to the fact that she was the only Western teenager in the room rather than his memory of her face on a mobile phone but she quickly put that out of her mind. The young man who joined them turned out to be Daniel, Teddy's uncle while Teddy's father, was the smiling older man with a shiny bald head and trim beard.

“Aah! So this is the child,” he said in a deep voice as he came over to sit next to her. “I think you already have spoken to my son.”

“Yes,” Vicky answered, still worried that she was going to get into serious trouble. “I was using the computer at school and, when I clicked on Ethiopia, Teddy appeared. I thought it was a website until he started talking to me. I'm sorry – he did tell me it was his uncle's mobile phone that he was using – but it was just so amazing I didn't want him to stop.”

The younger man looked at her then smiled. “Don't worry. Teddy admitted everything after it happened. I should never have left it out in my study. It was far too tempting for a young boy,” he said as he patted Teddy's short wiry black hair.

Teddy's father, Ato Tadesse, took his son's hand. “My son was very naughty. He has admitted to using the mobile phone and has been punished. You were not to blame.”

The manager had now joined them and they started to discuss the possibility of Vicky going to their house for a meal. The conversation switched from their native language to English as the manager announced, “So long as the Embassy knows where she is, I don't

think there will be a problem. She has her parents' phone numbers to inform them where she is going."

"Can she stay with us?" Teddy asked, finding the prospect of a new friend really exciting.

"I think we had better speak to her parents first," his father replied cautiously.

"Oh, I think we may be able to convince them it would be okay," I told Vicky. "This could be fun."

Outside the hotel they walked through the grounds and car park to a big 4 by 4 white car. Teddy had grabbed Vicky's hand and was asking questions. "Where have you been? Did you get a good mark for your project at school? When do you have to go back to school?"

She tried to answer his questions but she was also looking out of the car window at the amazing scenery. They drove out of the sanctuary of the Hilton Hotel into the real city with its beggars and poverty, and turned right up a hill towards the presidential palace grounds where armed soldiers scanned the area from their watchtowers. The wide road was busy with orange buses, blue and white painted minibuses and taxis, and big white cars, like the one they were in, all belching grey smoke. They continued to climb, passing roundabouts, government buildings and shops until they reached the impressive stone gates of the university campus where Daniel worked. Vicky looked in amazement at the hundreds of people and many buildings including large modern structures, some of which were unfinished and seemed to be held up with tree trunk scaffolding. There were elaborate churches and corrugated iron shacks selling fruit and drinks. They drove further on towards the high forested hillside then Daniel turned left off the main road down a rough stony lane with high walls on either side and parked the car outside a pair of tall metal gates.

He blew the car horn and soon the gates opened into a large courtyard area with a garden in front of a big single storey house of red bricks under a green metal roof. A big black dog bounded over to them from the grass as Vicky climbed out of the car.

“Don’t worry about him. He’s our guard dog but he doesn’t bite,” Teddy assured her. “Come and meet my mother and my little sister. We all live here.”

Vicky followed him up the steps to a cool veranda. It was quite hot now with clear blue skies. Beautiful climbing plants provided some shade and dropped their pink, purple and red petals on the tiled patio. A tall woman came out to meet them with a small girl of about two or three clutching her long skirt.

“Mama, this is Vicky. She’s the friend from England I told you about. Vicky this is my mother and my little sister, Esther.”

“Hello Vicky. You are welcome here,” his mother said and took hold of Vicky’s shoulders then kissed her on either side of her head. “Come Esther, don’t be shy. Say hello to Vicky.”

The little girl peeked from behind her mother and looked at Vicky. She had beautiful big brown eyes and a little turned up nose. Her tight curls were gathered into little bunches with yellow pompoms to match her dress and slippers.

“Now we are ready to eat lunch so I hope you are hungry. Go and show Vicky where to wash her hands, Teddy.”

The ritual washing of hands and eating with her fingers was a very different experience for Vicky. The food was strange but tasty. The *injera*, which was a bit like a large cold grey pancake, had to be torn into pieces which were used to scoop up different types of

spicy meat and vegetable sauces. They all sat down together and Vicky watched in surprise when another woman, a servant, cleared away the food. Then the servant brought in a tray of tiny cups, a small box filled with hot charcoal and other utensils and squatted on a low chair to prepare coffee. She roasted the beans on a metal plate over the coals adding some incense which gave off another aroma. Then she ground the beans with a pestle and mortar and put them into a round pot with one spout. After adding some water she heated the pot over the hot coals. Then she poured it into the cups and stirred sugar in.

When Vicky went with Teddy to wash her hands, still sticky from the food, she had loads of questions. “Don’t you ever use a knife and fork?” she asked.

“Sometimes. Especially if we have foreign food. Did you like our food?”

“Yes. It’s a bit like the spicy food I get when I’m staying with my dad in Turkey. Mum doesn’t cook much unless we’ve got guests or my nan staying.”

“Our *serategna*, Tigist, does most of our cooking.”

“Is she your servant?”

“I suppose so but she is paid and lives in a small house at the back of our compound. She has been here all my life so she is more like a member of our family.”

“What about the coffee? Do you always go to that trouble to make a cup of coffee? My mum buys it in jar.”

“When we have guests, Tigist likes to do a coffee ceremony. Today she did it for you. Did you like our coffee?”

“Yes but I usually have milk in mine and not as much sugar.”

“That is how we drink it here. Now, are you going to try and telephone your parents again and tell them where you are?”

“Yes. Dad will have finished work for the afternoon and mum should be back home by now.”

“My father says he wants to speak to them too – he’ll reassure them that you are okay and can stay with us.”

“That would be great – much better than going back to the hotel.”

Vicky managed to speak to her father first. He was not angry but surprised that she had managed to get on the wrong plane. In previous years she had been accompanied so he blamed himself for not arranging for someone to look after her. Her mother was more cross even though Vicky explained it was a mistake. She pleaded to stay with Teddy and his family until a flight could be arranged. “I’ll be much safer here than in the hotel and it will be cheaper. Please let me stay. Teddy’s dad says it will be okay and his mother will look after me.”

Eventually, after a brief discussion with Teddy’s father, Vicky’s mum consented and promised to repay any expenses. Her final words to Vicky were, “I know you too well, Vicky, and I wouldn’t be at all surprised if you hadn’t partly been responsible for getting the wrong flight. Just be careful. You may get into real difficulty one day if you try to get your own way. Now, be a good girl for Teddy’s mum and dad and don’t get into any more trouble.”

As Vicky put the phone down she looked at Teddy and grinned.

Chapter 5

After Vicky had made the phone calls, Teddy's uncle invited them into his study. It was a small room, dark with old books, journals and newspapers almost covering two walls and piled high from the floor to the ceiling on shelves and cupboards. Facing the small window, which looked out onto the garden, was a large old desk covered in papers and pieces of wire and metal. Silently, Daniel opened a desk drawer and took out a mobile phone.

Sitting in the desk chair, he gestured for them to sit on a small wooden bench next to him. They watched and waited, impatient to see what the mobile phone could reveal.

“Unfortunately I don't have a computer at a home so I will have to show you what this can do on the phone screen. When Teddy sent those pictures to you over the internet he was using the early version of this instrument. Since then I have been working on it and I have developed something more advanced.”

Teddy and Vicky looked at him, eager to see what he had invented. I have to admit that I, too, was intrigued so kept silent in Vicky's head.

“The previous version could show pictures on the screen, and even transfer those pictures to a bigger screen. This phone can do the same. Look.”

He opened a book of Ethiopian history and pointed the phone's camera at an illustration of one of the country's rock hewn churches. Vicky yawned. She'd already seen this. He then showed her the image on the screen. She looked at the small picture of the building she had previously seen in the book Teddy had shown her, then gasped as she realised that the people in the picture were moving, chanting and praying. Teddy peered over

her shoulder to see what had surprised her. He couldn't believe what he had seen on the mobile phone's screen. The photographs in the book had suddenly appeared to come to life.

"That's amazing," she cried. "Can it take any picture back to life?"

"I think so. I've only experimented with photographs that I've taken from Ethiopian sources. The photographs captured a split second of the event that was taking place. The camera in the phone picks up that moment and then takes it forward. Let me show you another photograph."

Daniel opened a book on the Emperor, Haile Selassie I, who had ruled the country until 1974. Although the image of the bearded man was an old black and white photograph, when the phone's camera was pointed at it, the figure moved turning away from the camera and waving his hand. The moving image lasted no more than a few seconds but it had taken them back to a period over thirty years ago.

"I'm now working on the next model," Daniel explained. "If I can release the image of a photograph on the screen of this phone and it can be picked up by the internet, there must be a way of creating a hologram. You know – a picture in space. One system has already managed to project a life-size, three-dimensional image of your Prince Charles onto a conference stage the United Arab Emirates. They used a living person but I think I can combine the technologies and transfer a hologram of the past."

"Wow, that's amazing," Vicky said and watched as Daniel turned the page of the book and pointed the camera at another photograph of the Emperor sitting in a horse drawn coach with a young Queen Elizabeth II sat beside him. For a few seconds the coach moved through the streets and both members of royalty waved at the crowds.

“She’s your queen,” Daniel said.

“Never! Our queen’s old and grey.”

“Yes,” Daniel agreed, “but the photograph was taken in the 1960’s when she visited Ethiopia. My father remembers seeing her but he died a few years ago.”

“I’ve never seen her,” Vicky admitted. “It would be amazing to be in that crowd.”

“Maybe we can recreate that experience. I’ll just have to work quickly so that you can see her before you return home.”

“Me too?” Teddy asked, afraid of being left out.

“Of course! But you’d better be good, young man. Now what else can we look at before the battery needs recharging?”

“Have you a photo of the Emperor Theodros?” Teddy enquired. “He’s my hero. I was named after him,” he told Vicky.

“No photos, I’m afraid, and illustrations won’t work. You’ll have to just imagine what it was like in his company. What about this photograph of one of our cultural groups from the south?” Daniel pointed the phone at a colourful page with men and women in unusual white costumes captured in the middle of a dance. For a few seconds the dancers moved energetically, then the screen faded. “That’s all we can see. Now if you want to do something useful, start putting these books back while I work on the new mobile phone.”

I reminded Vicky to thank Daniel and help Teddy. He was already turning the pages of one of the old books, looking for his favourite emperor. Vicky was more interested in the photograph of her queen’s visit. “We’ve got to stay long enough to see a hologram of this,” I told her.

“Who was Emperor Theodros?” Vicky asked Daniel, looking at the picture Teddy had found of a barefoot man with long hair and dressed in white. “He doesn’t look like a king.”

“He was a famous ruler of our country about 150 years ago,” Daniel replied. “He had links with your country, but he met a sad end.”

“How?”

Daniel was about to reply when Teddy closed the book and interrupted them, “Let me show you the rest of the house and garden.”

“Good idea. You don’t want a history lesson on your first day here,” Daniel agreed.

“Come!” Teddy urged. “Can I borrow this book, uncle?”

“Of course, if you look after it. I’ll see you both later.”

Teddy led Vicky out of the study leaving Daniel sat at the desk, scribbling notes and diagrams on his notepad.

“First I’ll show you my room.”

Vicky followed, her mind reeling with the images she had seen. In his small room she sat on the bed while he sat on the floor and opened the book. Vicky closed her eyes and I didn’t protest. We were ready for a rest. She put her head on the pillow and sleepily glanced at Teddy who was totally engrossed. The next thing we knew was Teddy’s mother entering the room. By then it was almost dark. Vicky had been asleep for over three hours and Teddy had gone out. It was now seven in the evening – or, to be more accurate, one o’ clock Ethiopian night time. Their day starts when it gets light instead of after midnight. It was time for the evening meal.

Chapter 6

By the next day Vicky was back to normal. She was wide awake before dawn as a heavy rainstorm hammered on the corrugated iron roof of the outbuildings and flashes of lightning lit up the sky and her small room. It was nothing like the rain she experienced back at home. The first loud rumble of thunder had shaken her awake. Then she heard the rain which hit the ground outside her room with such force that she thought someone had turned a hosepipe on full. She knelt up in bed and pulled the thin curtain aside to watch the scene.

“We won’t be going far today if this keeps up,” I warned her.

“I thought Ethiopia was supposed to be hot and dry. I can’t believe this country suffers from drought,” she muttered to herself.

“Maybe we should ask Teddy if it’s unusual,” I suggested.

Vicky got out of bed and put her clothes on. She didn’t like getting back into dirty underwear but had nothing else to change into. She crept out of her room and along the passage to Teddy’s room. There was nobody moving inside the house, the dim interior of which was lit by the receding lightning flashes. There was no answer when she knocked on Teddy’s door.

“Probably still asleep. Why not see if there’s anyone in his uncle’s study?” I suggested. Vicky didn’t need a second prompt. She crept across the hallway and tried the door. It was unlocked and she started to enter.

“What are you doing?” a voice suddenly called behind her. She turned to see Daniel stood in the hallway with a torch.

“I was awake and wanted something to read. I’m sorry, I know I should have asked but no one was up,” Vicky admitted. I suggested she ask to look again at the book with the queen in it.

Daniel ushered her into the room and turned on the light switch. Nothing happened. “Power cut again. The rains were late this year so there’s been a water shortage and, consequently, a lack of power – hydroelectricity. Let me see if I can find a book for you.”

“So you have wet weather too?”

“We do. Two wet seasons a year in most places apart from the desert areas. Here in Addis Ababa we have long rains from June till Meskel – that’s near the end of September in your calendar. It’s a celebration day here as our spring begins. Then it will be dry till after Christmas when there is the period of the short rains; they should have stopped by now. Ah, I think this is the book you wanted to look at.” Daniel handed her the heavy book full of photographs and led her out of the study.

“Thanks. I promise I’ll be careful with it.”

“Just let me have it back when you’ve finished with it. Breakfast will be ready in about an hour but you can get a drink of water from the jug in that room where you had dinner if you’re thirsty. I’ll see you later.”

“We may as well sit in that room to read this,” I told her. “At least there will be a bit more light from that big window.”

Vicky turned over the pages of the book, photographs from another era showing a small bearded man posing with people from across the world. Haile Selassie seemed a commanding figure despite his size. Vicky read small extracts from the book about his palace

in Addis Ababa where lions wandered in the grounds. Then she found the photograph with Queen Elizabeth. “Wouldn’t it be fantastic to be there, in that crowd?” I said. “We must convince Daniel to work on the mobile to create a hologram of the scene. You could describe it and add it to your project when you return to school.”

Vicky didn’t need any further persuasion. Over breakfast of eggs scrambled with onion and peppers (which she usually wouldn’t eat), she asked him how long it would take him to finish his work on the new mobile phone.

“If I get power today I should be able to work on it. I’m hoping to try it out this afternoon. I suppose you’d like to see if it works?” he added looking at Teddy.

“Definitely! Then I’d like you to experiment with pictures rather than photos. I really want to see the Emperor Theodros.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Now what have you two got planned for today?”

“I’m taking Vicky to get some more clothes this morning,” Teddy’s mother said, pouring juice into cups for the children. “She won’t fit into my clothes and Esther’s are far too small,” she added, holding the cup for her daughter as she drank.

“Thank you,” Vicky replied. “Will Teddy be coming too?”

“Yes, I think he can join us. Our *seratenya* will look after Esther. Tadesse, are you taking the car to work?”

Teddy’s father looked up from the paper he was reading and nodded.

So, after breakfast they boarded a minibus which stopped at the end of their road. They all squeezed onto one double seat and then it set off with a young boy leaning out of the

door window calling '*Arakilo*' or something like that. The rain had stopped but the sky was grey with menacing clouds. As they set off down the hill Vicky stared out of the window at the people, and those who noticed her stared back and smiled when she waved. There were people sitting or laying down on the footpaths while others weaved between them, as if they didn't exist. The taxi stopped frequently to let people on and off.

"That's the university. Part of it was once Haile Selassie's palace," Teddy said pointing to stone archways where there were many young people talking. They went round a big monument and continued down the tree lined hill passing a museum, shops and cafes before Teddy's mother called out a word that sounded like, '*woraj*' and the taxi stopped.

They walked down the road which was full of people selling everything from underwear to CDs from mats on the floor. Young shoeshine boys, some in ragged clothes, tried to catch her eye and she almost tripped over a beggar with distorted limbs lying on the ground as she watched another blind beggar being led by a young girl. People were reading newspapers, some children and women were selling tissues and biscuits from makeshift stalls, others were wandering hand in hand along the street oblivious of those around them. Vicky held onto Teddy's mother's hand, nervous of her environment.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," I told her, unconvincingly, as all around us people seemed to be pushing and jostling, staring at Vicky, laughing and pointing. Meanwhile, Teddy kept up a running commentary on the places we passed.

"That is the café where we sometimes stop for a Fanta or Coca Cola. We get juice in that place – they make it with papaya, mango, banana and avocado. Can we get one Mama?"

"Later, Teddy. Later! Vicky needs some clothes first."

By lunch time Vicky had been kitted out with some new underwear, a sweater, tee shirts, jeans and a pair of more sensible shoes. Then they went back to the juice bar, to have the multi-layered drink which was so thick it needed a long teaspoon. Vicky, who usually had to be forced to eat fresh fruit at home, was surprised how good it tasted.

The whole morning had been an adventure but the sky was darkening again and Teddy's mother urged them to hurry so they could get home before the rain started. They caught another minibus and, just as they set off, the first drops fell. Soon the water was pouring down the side of the road, umbrellas went up everywhere and the windscreen wipers swished back and forth as the cars, lorries and taxis sprayed unlucky pedestrians. When they reached their stop, rain was still falling, but not so heavily, so they walked to the house sheltering under a big umbrella and trying to avoid the puddles.

Daniel was sat in the main room, waiting for them with a smile on his face. "I have something to show you. Follow me."

They all followed him into his study. He picked the mobile phone up from his desk and keyed in some numbers. "We need to have physical contact for this to work. Hold hands with each other."

At first nothing seemed to happen. Then they noticed that the shelves on one of the walls seemed to disappear and the wall behind appeared. They looked at each other in surprise. All the books and papers had gone from the desk and other materials replaced them – an old inkpot and pens and a heavy leather-bound book. Then they noticed a picture on another wall.

"Daniel! It's your father's portrait!" Teddy's mother cried, her hand clutching his arm. "Where did that come from?"

Daniel pressed the keypad of the mobile phone again and everything returned to normal. He looked at the astounded faces and laughed. “So it worked,” he said. “I wasn’t sure if it would. I knew it could work for me, but now I know I can take others with me.”

“Take others where?” Teddy asked, looking round in confusion. “What happened?”

As the family started talking to each other in their own language, I started putting questions in Vicky’s head. “Wow! That was incredible. Did you see how the whole room change? I think we went back in time. I wonder if we could go back anywhere to any time. Just think, we could go back to the Queen’s visit if we knew when and where she was passing with the Emperor. Ask Daniel if that’s possible?”

Daniel started to explain to us in English what had happened. “I knew that it would be possible to create a hologram of an image if the conditions were right. I needed to find a way of picking up that image from the past. So I put a tracking device into the mobile that would pick up the image of the location where the mobile was situated. Then I worked out a way of resetting the time to another date. If it worked for a few seconds earlier I knew it would also work for any time in the past. So I just set the date ten years ago to the day. This room used to be my father’s study – your grandfather, Teddy.”

“Yes, I remember. He died a few years ago. I was sometimes allowed into his study when I was very young.”

“But your father’s portrait hangs in the hall now?” Teddy’s mother asked. “I’d forgotten how this room used to look before he died. You’ve been using this as your study for many years.”

“I couldn’t believe what memories it brought back. I was careful to choose this date as I knew he was away at the time. I don’t think I could have coped with seeing him as well.”

“So you can bring people back as well?” Vicky asked.

“Well not exactly. What happens is you see whatever was in the location whether it is an object, or people. I’m not sure what would happen if I keyed in the same time yesterday, when we were sitting here. I imagine we would see ourselves but we wouldn’t be able to interact. I’ve not mastered how to achieve that yet.”

“But will you?” Teddy asked.

“I’m working on it.”

“We could see people in history though?” Vicky enquired.

“Yes. As long as we’re in the exact location they were in at a given time and date.”

“So could we see my Queen again if we were in the place they passed on that day?”

“I don’t see why not. Why don’t you both look through the book again and find out the exact time, date and location that she was here with our emperor. If it’s feasible, I’ll try to take you back there one day.”

Are you sure that’s a good idea, Daniel?” Teddy’s mother warned.

“No harm will come to us. They will get a fleeting glimpse then they will be back in the present. Don’t worry,” he reassured her, leading her out of the study and past his father’s portrait in the hallway.

Chapter 7

Later that same day both Vicky and Teddy were excited as Daniel led them out of the house and down the road on the long walk to the Jubilee Palace. The sun was shining between the clouds building up in the sky. They were all excited as they hoped to see a brief image of the Emperor of Ethiopia in the Imperial carriage with the Queen of England.

“Now are you sure you have found the date and time of the procession?” he asked them.

“Yes, Vicky found it in the book with the photograph. It may not be the exact time as that information wasn’t written down,” Teddy explained. He was wearing a white tee shirt with a print of the Emperor on the front.

“Well, I know my father was there during school time so we’ll have to assume that it was some time in the late morning. We’ll know as soon as we’ve keyed in the details. If there are no crowds then we’re either too early or too late.”

“I just hope we see them,” Vicky sighed, running to catch up with Daniel and Teddy who were both taller than her. Teddy grinned at her revealing the gap between his front teeth.

They had not told Teddy’s mother that they were going to the palace that afternoon, afraid of her reaction. Tadesse had gone to work so wouldn’t find out until he arrived home in the evening.

“Didn’t you bring an umbrella?” Daniel asked Teddy.

“No, I forgot. Don’t worry. It’s not going to rain,” he added confidently.

Vicky glanced up at the sky and wasn't so optimistic but she had her new shoes on and wouldn't get such wet feet. Her other shoes were now ruined.

As they got closer to the palace entrance, a stone gateway set back from the main road, Vicky worried that maybe this was a bit too adventurous. After all, she had only met Daniel and Teddy the previous day. If something went wrong, how would her parents find out?

I reassured her. "He's a scientist. He's hardly likely to lead his own nephew into danger." Vicky breathed a sigh of relief and took Teddy's hand as they watched Daniel take the mobile phone out of his pocket.

"Now we know that the carriage must have left the palace in the morning and so I think it was bound to go down the main road towards the rest of the city. If we stand near the kerb we should get a view. Are you both ready?"

Teddy and Vicky looked at each other, their hands gripped tight and they nodded.

"Okay. Give me the date and time."

Vicky gave him the date she'd found in the book, February 1965 and they guessed the time. They watched as Daniel keyed in the numbers and waited for the view to change.

At first nothing seemed to happen then they were aware of the traffic disappearing. They saw figures around them fade and others appeared dressed in different clothes and with longer hair, like the Afro style Vicky had seen in pop group pictures. She held onto Teddy with one hand and Daniel kept a hand on her shoulder. There was no sign of flag-waving crowds or any royal procession. Although they spoke in a language she didn't understand, Vicky heard the people nearby talking excitedly. They were all male and the reactions of

some were angry. Then a group of police wandered over and started to break up the groups. For a moment it appeared as if it would become violent and Vicky felt Daniel's hand tighten as he held on to her.

“I think there's a problem,” I told her. “We need to get out of here.”

Within a few minutes the images began to disappear and she noticed Daniel frantically pressing more numbers into the mobile phone. Within seconds they were back in the 21st century. The blue and white taxis and minibuses reappeared on the road and all around her people were gathered in groups talking as if nothing was happening, apart from a distant rumble of thunder which predicted another downpour.

“What happened?” Teddy asked as Daniel quickly led them up a tree lined road towards the main highway.

“We got the wrong year.”

“The wrong year?” Vicky exclaimed. “But I was careful to check the date and it was 1965. I found two books and the visit was definitely in 1965.”

“Yes. It was 1965 in your time. But in Ethiopia our calendar is different to the rest of the world,” Daniel explained.

“Of course,” Teddy agreed. “I completely forgot about that. So does the mobile only recognise the Ethiopian calendar?”

“Yes. I should have checked first. I know most books use the western calendar but I still use the Ethiopian calendar which is about eight years different.”

“So we did go back in time?” Vicky asked. She was confused to discover that, not only was the clock different here, but the year was as well.

“Oh yes. It took me a while to work out when we had arrived but I know it definitely wasn't 1965 in your calendar.”

“How can you be certain?” Teddy asked.

“Let me take you to the museum. It's going to rain soon so we'll be sheltered and you can see something of our history,” Daniel said, hurrying us across the road.

“You'll enjoy that,” I said to Vicky in a sarcastic voice. “Maybe we should try to get back to Britain before this turns into a long history lesson.”

“Will we be able to see the Queen's procession now you know what went wrong?” she enquired. “I don't really like museums. They're boring.”

“Oh this one isn't.” Teddy told her as Daniel stopped a minibus taxi and pushed them onto the crowded back seat.

“I want to show you a few pictures that I haven't got at home...” Daniel began.

“And you can see the Emperor's bedroom and his bath,” Teddy added enthusiastically.

“Looks like we've got some opposition,” I told her. “It may be better to agree and go with them. You never know, it may be interesting.”

They got off the minibus at the university gates then walked through the grounds to the museum. As they entered the large stone doorway Vicky saw a wide hallway with

information boards along one wall. She wandered along looking at the paintings and photographs of previous emperors and Haile Selassie I as Daniel and Teddy disappeared round the corner at the end. She felt the air chill and as the rain started, people darted into the hallway to avoid the downpour. When she reached the others, Daniel was sat on the wide stone stairs talking to Teddy.

“Can you tell Vicky what you heard?” Teddy said.

“Tell me what?” she asked, sitting on the step next to Daniel.

“Okay. The reason I knew we had arrived in the 1970s was because I heard the students around me talking about the famine.”

“I see,” she said, unconvincingly.

“Have you heard of the big famine in 1984? I believe Bob Geldof made a record and had concerts in Britain to raise money.”

“I’m not sure. I wasn’t born then.”

“Well that wasn’t the first time there had been a famine in Ethiopia. There was another serious drought in the early 1970s when Haile Selassie was still the ruler. In February the people in the north of the country, hundreds of kilometres from here, were starving and some marched to the capital to make the government aware of their problem. They never made it through the police blockade on the edge of the city and had to return home without the Emperor hearing their story.”

“So what did you hear today?”

“Well rumours spread quickly, particularly among students. They are, after all, intelligent young people, and they were aware that things were not going right in the country.

I heard them discussing the fact that the protesters had been turned away and their Emperor had been informed. They questioned why he was refusing to accept the problem. Some believed that he didn't know what was going on but others felt that he was very much aware.

People in the rest of the world didn't find out what was happening until months later when one of your journalists made a visit to that area in the north and made a film which told the world what had happened. Haile Selassie had to accept there was a problem then but it was too late - too late for all the people, including children, who lost their land, their possessions and faced death and starvation with no support from the government or the rest of the world."

"That's horrible," Vicky cried.

"It was awful. I remember as a young boy being told at school how people even tried to eat the rotting animals – something they would never do unless there was nothing else. Thousands died in a relatively short period - too many for families and friends to bury."

"How awful!"

"The impact on Ethiopia was devastating. In 1974 Haile Selassie was overthrown by a military group which took over the country and killed many students and people who threatened their rule. They stayed in power until 1991 when the present government took power. However, that's too simple an explanation. Look, we'll have a look round some of the more interesting exhibits here and, when the rain stops, we'll go home and I'll recharge the phone. If I think it will work, we'll try to see your queen's visit tomorrow."

"Thank you. Okay, Teddy, now you can show me the Emperor's bathroom."

Teddy led her up the stairs while Daniel talked to one of his university colleagues. When they returned an hour later, Daniel was still deep in conversation and promised to meet them outside where the sun had emerged and the air was warm. Steam rose from the stone steps and bird song came from the rich green foliage. A strange monument – a stone spiral staircase leading nowhere – stood in front of the museum and Vicky had the urge to climb it.

“Go on,” I told her. “You won’t get hurt and you can’t damage it.”

As Vicky started to climb the steps, Teddy called after her. “Vicky, get down. You aren’t allowed to do that. You’ll get shot.”

Vicky turned, laughing at his reaction. “They can’t shoot me for playing.”

Teddy looked annoyed. “You are a silly girl. The guards here all carry guns and aren’t afraid to use them. You need to be more sensible.”

“I think you’ve upset him,” I told her as she climbed down and went over to him. “How can you make it up to him? You need him as your friend.”

“I’m sorry, Teddy,” she said, trying to suppress a giggle as he stared at her fiercely, his hands clenched.

“Seriously Vicky, you need to realise that this country is different to yours. I remember how the police reacted after one election. Some students were shot and our school had armed police outside to prevent uprisings. I was scared,” he admitted.

“You were scared of what, Teddy?” questioned Daniel who appeared at that moment.

“I was telling Vicky about the riots after one of the elections.”

“Oh, that. Yes it was a dangerous time but it’s safe now. You’re not to worry, Vicky. Now let’s get you both home before Teddy’s parents get worried. My friend here has a car and will drive us back.” They followed Daniel and his colleague to a car park and climbed into the back of an old VW.

Later that evening, as they all sat round the big table sharing a meal, Daniel admitted to Teddy’s parents what had happened that day.

“Were you in any danger?” Tadesse asked.

“No. We were observers but no one could see us. I know it seems crazy but it did seem that, for those few minutes, we were really there. I was talking to a colleague who had been researching that period. He was aware that information about the march had reached the palace but had never seen any written evidence of students discussing it before now.”

“You told him what you’d done?” Tadesse exclaimed. “Isn’t that dangerous?”

“My close colleagues in my department are fully aware of what I’ve been working on. I don’t think I’ll cause any problems by putting my trust in colleagues elsewhere. I can use this tool to gather information that will help to gather historical facts with no risks. Not everything has been accurately recorded – as you well know. Now we can observe history and see what is happening.”

“So will you be able to visit the Emperor Theodros?” Teddy asked, his face suddenly lit up with excitement.

“I suppose we could but we can only see into the past if we are in the actual location. He didn’t come to Addis Ababa and his lands are a long way from here, even by car.”

“But it would be possible to go that far back.”

“Of course it would. I suppose we could go back to the time of Lucy if we had an exact date. However, I wouldn't recommend it.”

“Will we get to see the visit of Queen Elizabeth?” Vicky asked, drawn into the conversation that was being conducted in her language for her benefit.

“I promise I will try to arrange that but I will check the time and date next time. Now, please excuse me. I have some important work to do.”

Later, when Vicky got up to use the bathroom, she noticed a light coming under the door of Daniel's study. It was past midnight but he was still working. She knocked on the door but there was no answer.

Chapter 8

Daniel was missing at breakfast the next day. When asked where he was, Tadesse put his newspaper down and told Vicky that he had worked late and was tired. Vicky was impatient to see the queen but I told her to remain calm. “You won’t achieve anything by being sulky or angry.”

Teddy was also eager to see his uncle. He brought another book about Theodros to the breakfast table and was absorbed in it, taking no notice of anyone else.

Vicky felt lonely until Esther toddled in with her mother and they sat down next to her. Esther hid behind her mother and looked round at her, shyly at first, but soon she seemed more confident and then giggled as Vicky played hide and seek with her. Her chubby hands stuffed bread into her mouth and picked up her mug of weak tea and milk. By the time the meal was finished, she was trying to grab Vicky with sticky fingers. Vicky encouraged her until her mother sat Esther on Vicky’s knee and wiped her hands and face with a damp cloth.

“You have a friend to play with now,” she told Esther. “But you have to be a good girl.” Esther looked at her mother and smiled. She hadn’t understood the words but that didn’t seem to matter as the meaning was communicated. Vicky had only been in their home for two nights and she was already able to recognise a few words of their language. *Shy* meant tea and *ow* was yes. She had asked Teddy how to say ‘thank you’ but couldn’t pronounce it yet – it was a huge word.

While she was playing with Esther, Daniel entered the room. He was clearly excited, despite being tired and was still wearing the clothes he’d worn the previous day.

“Good morning everyone,” he announced and poured himself some tea and heaped three teaspoons of sugar into it. “I have something to tell you. Where’s Marta?” he asked calling for Teddy and Esther’s mother.

“She’ll be in the kitchen,” Tadesse replied and went to get his wife.

“Where were you last night?” Vicky asked. “I went to your study because the light was on but you didn’t answer.”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about. I’ve made an amazing discovery.”

Teddy had closed his book and was eagerly awaiting the news. When his mother and father returned he urged his uncle to tell them what he’d found.

“After I left you last night I tried to use the mobile phone to go back in time. Now when I did that before I was able to go to a particular time and observe whatever was happening for two or three minutes. Then the battery would weaken and I would have to return to the present. I’ve always wanted to know what would happen if I did not key in the present time and date and the battery went dead.”

“Well you’re here now so I assume it wouldn’t matter,” Tadesse commented.

“That’s what I thought, but something else happened.”

“What?” everyone asked.

“I thought I would go back in time to see if I could observe my father working in the study. We’d gone back ten years to that time when he was away, hadn’t we?”

“Yes.” Marta replied, cautiously.

“I knew father had been working in this study just before he died eight years ago. So, I decided to set the time and date to when he would have been here...”

“You saw our father here, last night?” Tadesse interrupted his brother.

“Yes. I watched him writing at the desk. It was strange. I really felt I was back in that time. I was so absorbed looking at him that I forgot to key the current time and date into the mobile. Now I had assumed that the battery would simply run down and I’d either be stuck in that time or I’d automatically be returned to the present.”

“Is that what happened?” Teddy said.

“No. Not exactly. For some time my father just sat there, writing, absorbed in his work. I stood behind him for ages, just watching him working. Then I moved towards him and he turned and looked at me. It was strange. It was as if he could see me. I even spoke to him. I just said “father” but I don’t think he heard. He just scratched his head then turned round and went back to his writing. I hadn’t realised until that point that he was writing his diary.”

“I knew he kept a diary,” Marta confirmed. “There were quite a number of his journals in that box we put in the storeroom. I assumed he was keeping notes for his work.”

“My grandfather was a teacher of English,” Teddy explained to Vicky. “He worked right up to the time he was ill. He taught me to speak English.”

“Yes,” Daniel continued. “I knew he kept a diary but didn’t think it would be interesting. After watching him last night I searched for his last diary in the study but couldn’t find it. Now you’ve told me where it is, Marta, I must read it.”

“But what happened next? How did you get back?” Teddy questioned. He was impatient to know the outcome.

“Well, I looked at the mobile phone in my hand and realised that time had stood still. When I checked my watch I knew I’d been there for over fifteen minutes. The mobile was not using any power at all while I was in away in another time. This means that I can spend any length of time away and know that I will return to the present without losing valuable battery power.”

“I’m not sure I understand,” said Tadesse. “Do you mean that when you return anywhere the time will be the same time as when you left?”

“Yes, if that’s the time I key in. If I were to key in an earlier time and date I would arrive then. I’m not sure what would happen if I keyed in a future time,” he added, a look of curiosity on his face.

“Don’t try it,” Marta insisted. She was looking confused and worried by the implications of Daniel’s discovery.

“So let me get this clear, you can be away for any length of time and the battery won’t go flat?” Teddy now asked.

“It would appear so. The battery is not used when we’re in a different time. This is a brilliant discovery. Recharging a mobile phone isn’t always easy, even today what with frequent power cuts and trying to find a socket. It would be impossible to recharge one in the past.”

“Just think,” I said to Vicky, “when we do get to finally see the Queen, it won’t just be a fleeting glimpse. We’ll be able to have a long look at her and the Emperor. Remind him that he promised to take us to see her today.”

“So will we be going to see the Queen this morning?”

Everyone turned to look at Vicky.

“I’m not happy with that. I promised your mother and father that we would look after you,” Marta said, putting a hand on her arm. “We’ll take you to see another museum which will have photographs of the event.”

“Doesn’t she realise how boring that sounds?” I commented. “As if a collection of old relics and photographs can compare with a living museum.”

“I know you must be worried about me and I’m grateful but this is such an exciting discovery. Please let me have one more opportunity to experience it. I don’t care what you show me. There’s so much about your country that I want to learn and this is like being in a ...a living museum.”

“Yes please can we have another try, uncle?”

“What do you think, brother? Do you trust me?”

Tadesse appeared torn between upsetting his wife and annoying his brother. He finally agreed to let them have another experience, as long as he too could be present.

“Okay. Then we will go back to the palace later today. First I want to find those diaries that father wrote, particularly the last one, the one he was writing before he died.”

“I’ll get it for you,” Marta said, giving her husband a look that clearly showed her annoyance. Esther ran after her mother and Tadesse followed, trying to make amends.

“Now you two must search all the books. I have to find out where and when we will get the best view of the Imperial coach. And don’t forget to use the Ethiopian calendar.”

By lunchtime they had all the facts they needed and outside there was a blue sky with hardly a cloud in sight. Tadesse, who had gone to work in the morning, returned early to join them. When Daniel appeared at the table, he seemed distracted. Everyone filled their plate and started to eat in silence, waiting for Daniel to say something.

Eventually Teddy spoke. “We’ve got the information uncle. We think we’ve got the exact time and place.”

“Good. I hope you’re correct. We can’t afford to make a mistake again.”

“Did you read grandfather’s diary?”

“Yes.”

“Did you find anything interesting?” Marta asked, trying to feed Esther who had become tired and irritable and kept crying and trying to escape.

“Actually, yes. Let us eat first then I’ll tell you.”

The meal was eaten in virtual silence apart from Esther’s cries and Marta’s words of encouragement. At the end of the meal, as coffee was served by Tigist and Esther lay asleep in her mother’s arms, Daniel started to speak.

“Father’s diary entry for 1992 in the Ethiopian Calendar. He wrote in English, which is probably why I never bothered to read it before now. This is the June entry: ‘Peace at last. The war with Eritrea has come to an end with a peace plan. Will it last? It was such a crazy war that never should have started. I have just spent a couple of hours looking through the books trying to find a justification for Ethiopia’s position. I failed.’ He then stopped and wrote this: ‘I feel that I am being watched. It’s strange because I do not feel afraid of this presence. I can’t see or hear anyone but I know I am not alone. I must tell my sons.’ He then continued writing his thoughts on the war.”

“Did father say anything to either of you?” Marta asked.

“If he did, I don’t remember, do you?” Tadesse said to Daniel.

“No. I didn’t even know he was keeping such a detailed journal. It’s fascinating. He must have fallen ill soon after this was written because he died later that year. He was only in his fifties. I’d just returned from doing my doctorate in the States when he fell ill.”

“We’ve always lived at home,” Tadesse explained, “but I don’t remember talking much about his writing. After mother died he seemed to absorb himself in his work and spent long hours at his school. He was an excellent teacher.”

“When did my grandmother die?” Teddy asked, mainly for Vicky’s benefit as he’d been told many times that she died the day he was born thirteen years ago. Vicky however took little notice of what Teddy was saying. I was planting thoughts in her head and she was eager to question Daniel.

“Do you think he thought you were a ghost?”

“I suppose in a way I do. He was aware of some form of spirit though nothing visible.”

“Do you think those people yesterday might have been able to see us?”

“I doubt it. They were engrossed in their own company and probably wouldn’t have noticed us, even if we’d been visible. We always assume that a ghost or spirit comes back from the past. It is strange to think that we could be visited by something from the future.”

“I don’t like it,” Marta said, carrying the sleeping Esther out of the room.

“I think it’s spooky,” Vicky said.

“Spooky? That’s a strange word,” Teddy said, breaking the formal atmosphere with a snigger.

“So are you still happy to experience the procession of our Emperor and Queen Elizabeth?” Daniel asked them.

“Oh yes,” Vicky and Teddy exclaimed while Tadesse nodded, not completely certain, but clearly not wanting to be left out.

Chapter 9

They were standing in the same place as before, by the gates to the palace, with the few people around taking little notice of the rest of the group though Vicky was subject to stares. Children selling tissues and chewing gum came over to her urging her to buy '*soft*', as tissues were appropriately named, and '*mastica*'. She shooed them away, impatient for Daniel to set the mobile back to the date in the Ethiopian calendar when her Queen came to visit the Emperor Haile Selassie I.

“Hold hands,” Teddy reminded her, “Or you won’t see your Queen.”

Vicky took his hand and Tadesse’s hand while Daniel held on to Teddy.

Just as before, the traffic started to fade away and the people around them disappeared, replaced by a large crowd. There were all age groups, some waving flags and others peering towards the drive from the palace. They were stood by the edge of the road where policemen were holding the people back.

Then the coach appeared, pulled by white horses and everyone cheered and clapped. Vicky spontaneously joined in, letting go of Teddy’s hand yet remaining in the same place and time. The carriage shone and the coachman and attendants were all dressed up. Soon she caught a glimpse of her young looking Queen looking through the carriage window and waving at the bystanders. Opposite her was the Emperor in his splendid uniform. The crowd around them shouted loudly and someone pushed her. She quickly took hold of Teddy’s hand again and Tadesse took her other hand, more firmly this time.

The procession seemed to last for ages but Vicky then became aware of everything fading as the carriage and horses went past. She glanced at Daniel who was keying something

into the mobile, a smile on his face. Teddy and Tadesse were also grinning but Vicky felt elated.

“How can we ever forget this?” I asked her. “Your mother and friends in school will never believe what you’ve seen.”

Vicky knew that the only people she could share this experience with were Teddy’s family. She wished she had brought a camera to capture that moment.

“Did you see the Queen wave at you?” Teddy asked as they returned to the present.

“She was looking at everyone, not just me.”

“No,” Daniel agreed. “She did see one European face in the crowd. She gave you a special wave.”

“Really,” Vicky exclaimed, suddenly excited to be the centre of attention.

“Oh I’m sure she didn’t see us,” Tadesse commented, deflating the situation and bringing her down to earth.

Daniel, however, did not agree with his elder brother and winked at Vicky. “I think she did see us. Now let’s go back and tell Marta. I’m sure she’s worried about us.”

The following evening Vicky and Teddy went to find Daniel but he was not in his study. Teddy started to look at the books on his shelves. Vicky saw the mobile phone on his desk and picked it up.

“Go on,” I urged her. “Key in a date and see what happens.”

Vicky was tempted but cautious. “What was the date yesterday?” she asked Teddy. He told her and she keyed in the details with the present time – guessing the Ethiopian clock

which was six hours different to that shown on her watch. Suddenly she found herself standing in the same place, by the desk, but there was no sign of Teddy. Then she heard Daniel enter the room and turned to see him pick up the telephone and dial a number written on a piece of paper, completely ignoring her.

“It appears he cannot see you,” I remarked. “Let’s get back to Teddy.”

She quickly dialled the time and date she had left and was returned to the present.

Teddy seemed not to have noticed her disappearance.

“I’ve just been back to yesterday,” she informed him, proudly.

“No you haven’t. You’ve been here all the time.”

“That’s because I returned at the same time as I left. You didn’t see me go.”

“Where did you go? What did you see?” he asked, clearly inquisitive.

“I went back exactly a day and saw your uncle enter this office and make a phone call.”

“What did he say?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t wait to find out. Besides, he’d probably talk in your language so I wouldn’t understand. Hey, there’s the paper with the number on,” she exclaimed, pointing to a letter on the desk.

Teddy looked at the letter, written in Amharic, then his face lit up. “We must go back and listen to his conversation.”

“Why?”

“Because this letter is from the head of his department and requests details of his trip to Meqdela.”

“So?” Vicky was getting concerned that Daniel might suddenly walk into the room and hear their conversation. I was eager to find out more. There was something familiar about that place name.

“Meqdela is the site of Theodros’s final battle. It is the site of the fortress he built and where he imprisoned lots of British people.”

“Really!” Vicky exclaimed. “Why?”

“It would take too long to explain. Look are you coming with me or not?”

I know we should have felt uneasy. Not only was it wrong to use Daniel’s property without his permission, but listening into a private phone conversation was not right. Vicky was about to refuse. She was clearly torn between what was morally correct and what might offer an exciting challenge. I planted a seed of courage in her mind and she immediately took hold of Teddy’s hand as he keyed in the time of the previous day when Daniel had entered the office.

After ten minutes spent observing his uncle, they came back in the present. Teddy was silent for a few minutes until Vicky urged him to translate what he’d overheard.

“He’s planning a visit to Meqdela to do some research using his new mobile phone. He’s been given leave to go north for a week.”

“When will he go?” Vicky asked, still not completely sure why Teddy was so excited.

“Tomorrow!”

“Oh what a pity. That means we’ll miss going into the past with him.”

“No it doesn’t.”

“What do you mean?” she enquired.

“We will go with him,” Teddy decided, his brown eyes flashing with excitement.

“Did he say that?”

“No, of course not. But we’ll convince him that we should go too.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Let’s get out of here before he returns. We’ve got to think of a plan.”

“I’m not sure I want to go with you,” Vicky said. I couldn’t believe she was turning this opportunity down. There were limits to how far I would let her go but here was a chance to have a real adventure. After a brief silence she changed her mind and added, “but I’m not going to be left here on my own.”

“Good. Come to my room and we’ll work out what to do next.”

Chapter 10

Later that evening, while the family were sat watching the television, Teddy asked his uncle if he could borrow his books on Theodros as he was planning to write an essay on him for school.

“Sorry, Teddy, but I need them. I’ll let you borrow them in a week’s time.”

“Surely you don’t need them all,” Tadesse said. He seemed to be pleased with his son’s interest in doing school work in the holidays.

“Maybe I could read them in your study.”

Daniel looked at his nephew, then he turned to his brother and admitted that he would need all these resources as he was going to set off to travel north to Meqdela the following day to carry out research.

Marta, who had been busy feeding Esther, glanced up. She appeared concerned. “Is this anything to do with that mobile phone?” she questioned.

“Well, actually, it is.”

“Can we go too?” Teddy asked, clearly pleased to hear the purpose of the visit being discussed.

Both his parents looked at him in amazement. “You are definitely not going there. Now look what you’ve done,” Marta accused Daniel.

“Why not? Is it going to be dangerous, uncle?”

“Of course not,” he replied, trying to make it appear innocent. “I just wanted to see if it was possible to get a picture of what happened there at a specific time on a particular day. You know I would take you along with me if your parents agreed but they are clearly worried about you. Besides, you have your guest to consider. I’m sure Vicky wouldn’t be happy if you disappeared.”

“Could I come too? I would be good and it would be so interesting to find out more about your history,” Vicky asked. Everyone looked at her as if she’d appeared from nowhere.

Even Teddy was stuck for words for a few seconds before agreeing with Vicky. “Yes, that would be great. We promise we’d do everything you told us. We would behave. And you and dad would have a break,” he added looking pleadingly at his mother.

“I forbid it,” she said.

“Hold on a minute,” her husband put in. “I was reassured by the experiment the other day, when we saw the Queen Elizabeth with Haile Selassie. There was no harm in watching the events but not being there. It would be a good experience for Teddy to visit that place. He’s always been fascinated by that period and, if it means he’ll settle down to some study, I have no real objection.”

Marta looked at her husband and shook her head. She picked up Esther, who was tired and started to cry, and left the room.

“I’ll speak to her and reassure her that it will be safe,” Tadesse told them. “Now I think you two should go and pack some things. Daniel, how long do you expect to be gone?”

Daniel now appeared to be regretting his words as he answered his brother. “No more than three days. It will take over a day to get there and maybe two days to get back. I planned

to find accommodation in Bahir Dar and take a tent in case there was nowhere to stay near Meqdela.”

“Good. We’ll keep in contact by mobile phone – your real phone I mean. But remember, brother, you are responsible for my son and Vicky. If anything should happen to either of them you will have to explain it to Marta - and Vicky’s parents. We’ve just had confirmation that she’s due to fly to Manchester at the beginning of next week so you mustn’t be late back.”

“We’ll be back. Okay kids, go and pack and get some sleep. We will be leaving early tomorrow morning. Tadesse, I want a word with you.”

“Great!” Teddy and Vicky rushed for the door, eager to pack and get some sleep before their great adventure. I was pleased that our scheming had been successful and told Vicky she could be proud of the part she’d played.

Very early the next morning, before it was light, Vicky was woken by heavy rain bouncing on the roof and the stream of water pouring from the corrugated roof onto the concrete path. She wanted to go to the toilet so crept out of her room into the dark corridor to go to the bathroom. She saw a light on in Daniel’s study and heard him talking with Tadesse in Amharic. She was only wearing an oversized T shirt so hid behind the bathroom door, leaving it slightly ajar as she watched them both emerge. They were carrying bags and heading for the outside door.

“It looks like they’re packing the car already,” I suggested. “Maybe you and Teddy should get up now or they might go without us.”

Vicky locked the bathroom door and, when she had finished washing, returned to her room and quickly put on her clothes. Then she rushed to Teddy's door and knocked on it.

"Come on, Teddy. Daniel's ready to leave."

Seconds later he was facing her, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "But it is only half past ten – that's half past four in your time. It's too early."

"But I saw them take the bags out to the car."

"Okay. I'll get dressed. Tell them I won't be long."

Vicky picked up her bag containing a few changes of clothing – in fact all the clothes she now possessed apart from those she'd arrived in. The shoes she had been so proud of now lay neglected under the bed. When she reached the outside door she heard the engine start so she ran through the pouring rain towards the driver's door. Tadesse stood by the compound gate under a big umbrella. He was unlocking it when he heard her shout at his brother.

"Hold on. Don't forget we're coming too."

Daniel wound down the window of the big vehicle and looked down at her, clearly exasperated. "Don't be intimidated by him," I told her. "Remember, they promised to take us."

"Sorry, we didn't expect you to leave so soon. Teddy's on his way. Shall I get in the back?" she asked.

Daniel appeared stuck for words but Tadesse, who really looked annoyed, ran to join them and said, "You can't go. It's far too dangerous. I promised the British Embassy that I would look after you."

“But you said it was okay last night.”

“I know, I’m sorry. My wife and I discussed it and, I agree with her, it is not a good idea. It’s a long journey and I cannot guarantee your safety and well-being.”

By now, Teddy had joined us, carrying his bag and wearing his jacket over his head. “What’s happening? Are we going now?”

His father looked at both of them and sighed, then looked at his brother and gave in. He suggested that, if they took great care, they could go but told his brother that he must return after three days. Daniel appeared really angry but he didn’t argue with his elder brother. He just unlocked the back door and told the children to get in. They didn’t need a second invitation to get out of the downpour and start their adventure.

Tadesse returned to open the compound gates and Daniel started the engine and switched on the headlights and windscreen wipers. Vicky and Teddy fastened their seat belts, waved at Tadesse and then looked at each other and smiled but remained silent. They would have to wait a long time for Daniel to calm down before they could talk again.

Chapter 11

As the sky began to lighten and the rain stopped, Vicky woke up and looked out of the car window. Although there were few buildings, there were many figures wandering along the road, some herding cattle with huge horns and humps on their backs, small flocks of sheep with thick woolly tails and donkeys tip-tapping daintily on their tiny hooves. Other people carried bundles and most were wrapped in white shawls – even the men.

Teddy was fast asleep, his head lolling forward and saliva dribbling out of the corner of his open mouth. Daniel was concentrating on driving and avoiding the potholes, people and animals. There was very little traffic on the road apart from a few buses, their roofs piled high with baskets, and packages, and wagons including a long red Coca Cola lorry which Daniel had trouble overtaking. Every time he pulled out to the left there would be a blind corner ahead or another vehicle coming towards us.

Everything was new and I kept saying to Vicky, “Look at this! Did you see that?” as we saw a different view of the countryside or passed through a built up area where people bustled round shop entrances. Unlike the brown thatched roof circular *tukuls* which they saw in the countryside, the town buildings had painted walls in a variety of colours and roofs of corrugated iron which reflected the recent rain in the early morning sun. People in mud coloured clothes wandered along the edge of the dirt road avoiding puddles and rocks, busily engaged in conversation with each other or concentrating on where they were going.

Eventually we reached the edge of a plateau. Daniel pulled off the road and stopped the vehicle at the top of a huge gorge, so wide it was difficult to see the other side which was obscured by low cloud.

Teddy woke up and looked around him in surprise. “Where are we?”

“The Blue Nile gorge. This is the *Abbay* which takes the water from Lake Tana to the River Nile in Sudan and eventually to Egypt,” Daniel explained.

“Wow! This is amazing,” Vicky exclaimed, relieved to be able to speak at last.

“Let’s get out and have a better look,” Daniel suggested.

For as far as the eye could see the brown river in the bottom of the deep wide chasm snaked its way in both directions. The valley sides were steep with tall trees between bare rocky patches. Overhead, vultures and other big birds soared, occasionally crying but, apart from that, there was no sound. Then two ragged clothed children emerged over the brow of the summit herding their family’s two cows and small flock of sheep. They were busy chatting to each other, cracking their whips and shouting at the animals so didn’t notice us until they were almost level with the car. Daniel shouted a greeting phrase we’d heard frequently over the last few days. The boys stopped and responded, suddenly more interested in watching us while their animals continued on their familiar route. The sound of a bus horn alerted them to the possible danger and they ran off shouting, “Ferenge, ferenge!” By now Vicky and I recognised this term for foreigner. I felt a familiarity with the scene and suggested to Vicky that it was like stepping back in time.

The air was still cold and Vicky began to shiver. “Come on, let’s get back in the car and move on,” Daniel said, adding, “Which one of you wants to sit in the front?”

“Me!” they both shouted but Vicky got to the door first.

The journey down the winding road to the bottom of the gorge took over half an hour but, as they drove round each hairpin bend, the views changed and she never got bored.

Teddy kept asking questions of Daniel, who appeared to have forgiven them and was his usual friendly self. At the bottom they came to a wide bridge over the fast flowing brown waters, swollen with the recent rains. “Many people are surprised to see so much water in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, most of this water serves no useful purpose here but feeds the crops and the people in Sudan and Egypt, taking much of the soil and nutrients to their lands.”

Then we started the long, slow ascent up the other side of the valley, finally reaching the plain and the tarmac road that took us between larger cooperatives of farms, some using modern tractors, towards the town of Debre Markos where we finally stopped for lunch. Vicky and Teddy were starving but, in an attempt to appease Daniel, they kept quiet. Now they jumped out of the car when he parked in front of a restaurant and almost ran inside, stopping briefly to wash their hands at the sink outside. Vicky was now getting used to people staring at her and smiled at them, using the phrase she’d learnt from others. “*Tenaystilign, dehna nachoo?*” They either responded politely or burst into spontaneous laughter at the sight of a white girl using their language to greet them.

Inside the dark spicy smelling restaurant they sat at a small metal table still bearing the fly covered remains of a previous occupant’s meal, and Daniel ordered food and drink for them. When the bottles of Pepsi and fizzy water arrived he shared it out between their glasses and then blessed the food that was served on one tray for all three. This wasn’t the first time Vicky had been exposed to traditional ways of eating and drinking in Ethiopia but she waited to see what the others did before taking a piece of the *injera* and parcelling a small amount of sauce or vegetables in it and eating it. This was fun. Her mother would have been shocked to see her eating with her fingers off the same plate as others in public but, everywhere she looked, others were doing the same. She was so hungry she didn’t even notice what the food

was – cabbage, beetroot, potatoes, carrots and mixtures of spicy pulses - things she would have turned her nose up at back home.

“The sauce is called *wat*,” Teddy told Vicky.

“What?”

“Yes, *wat*,” he confirmed.

Vicky didn't understand and shook her head. Soon they were back in the car, with Teddy sitting in the front. He stayed there for the remainder of their journey to the town of Bahir Dar where Daniel planned to spend the night. Vicky continued to look at the sights and the scenery before she started to doze, in spite of my encouragement to see what was going on, and she eventually fell asleep. She woke up when we reached the large town on the edge of Ethiopia's largest lake, Lake Tana. The car pulled into a small hotel car park near the lakeside and Vicky was given a room with a shower facing onto a small courtyard.

Back in Turkey, her father would have been appalled at the facilities compared to his own hotel. While there was a single bed with clean sheets and a blanket, the ‘facilities’ included a toilet with a broken seat, a cracked sink and a shower by a water heater with loose plug wires. Vicky decided a cold rinse would do. She was relieved when Teddy knocked on her door and invited her to walk into town with Daniel and himself.

The following morning, before daybreak, Daniel knocked and woke her from a heavy sleep.

“Come on, Vicky. We're setting off for Meqdela,” he whispered.

Although still tired, she quickly got out of bed and, within half an hour, they were on the road out of Bahir Dar towards their destination. As the sun rose, brushing the distant mountains with a pinkish hue, Vicky looked around in wonder. The road was bumpy so, though she was still tired, she couldn't sleep. Besides, there were too many interesting sights to see as the monochromatic view gradually became a full colour movie picture. As he drove, Daniel started to tell us a story that he had read as a child in school.

“During the reign of Emperor Theodros several visitors arrived from Europe. They travelled across the country, taking notes and making diagrams. They journeyed from the north to the south, from the east to the west. They crossed streams and rivers, travelled through deep valleys and over high mountains. They went across hot dry deserts and round the edge of enormous lakes. After weeks of exploration, making maps of the rivers, mountains, lakes, deserts and roads, they went to see the Emperor.

Theodros studied the maps carefully and was pleased with their work. ‘Here we can find all our rivers and mountains and see that the source of the Nile is Lake Tana.’ He gave the Europeans a feast with *wat* and *injera* to eat and *talla* and *tej* to drink. Then, after the feast, the Emperor gave the guests gifts of silver and gold.

Then they prepared to return to Europe with their new wealth and maps. Emperor Theodros sent several of his servants with them on their journey to the port. When they reached the sea they put all their belongings on the boat and were about to leave when one servant stopped them.

‘Give me your shoes,’ he ordered.

‘What for?’ they replied.

‘I must wash them.’

So they removed their shoes and gave them to the servant who washed them carefully. After they had dried in the sun he gave them back and wished them a good journey. But the Europeans were puzzled. ‘Why did you wash our shoes?’ one asked.

The servant answered, ‘You have seen all of our country, Ethiopia. You know what a beautiful place it is and you know how much we love our land. We plant our seeds and grow our food in this earth. All the roads that you saw were made by the feet of our parents and their parents. They are buried in this soil. The earth is our father and mother. The Emperor has given you gold and silver, but we will not give you our land. That is why he told me to wash your shoes before you leave our country.’

For a while after Daniel had finished the story Teddy and Vicky were quiet. Even I could not think of anything to say as I pondered on the pride that the people felt for their country. I felt a sense of nostalgia that had been growing since we set off north and tried not to disturb Vicky’s mind with my thoughts and ideas.

Through Vicky’s eyes I saw the view outside and had a strange feeling – had I been here before or was it simply because I’d seen so much similar action the day before? Only the scenery seemed different as we headed towards the high mountains through villages and past small farmsteads with grey straw-topped *tukuls* smoking in the early light as the morning *wat* and *injera* were cooked inside. Men and boys with sticks and whips took their oxen and wooden ploughs to the fields while others herded cattle and sheep to the grazing lands and water. Donkeys laden with yellow plastic water carriers, or eucalyptus branches, trotted ahead of their owners who were wrapped up against the cool morning air in layers of muddy green, brown and white garments.

Teddy broke the silence. “I hadn’t heard that story before. Were they the same Europeans who Theodros captured?”

Vicky looked at him in surprise. “Captured? What had they done?”

Daniel looked in the car mirror at his nephew. “I think you had better explain to Vicky the story of Theodros before we arrive in Meqdela. She needs to be prepared for what we might see if we are able to go back in time.”

So Teddy began the long story of his hero.

Chapter 12

When they stopped for lunch in a small village café, Vicky was exhausted. Not only was the journey long and sometimes the road was so rough that she kept bouncing out of her seat, but listening to Teddy's enthusiastic retelling of the story of Emperor Theodros had been hard work. Although his English was good, it was still difficult to understand his accent and he had to repeat most sentences. By the end of the story she was yawning and beginning to feel nauseous. It was a good time to stop.

After the ritual of washing hands, being stared at by the locals, eating the food and drinking Pepsi mixed with water, Vicky was ready to move again. Daniel was in deep conversation with one of the men who pointed up the valley to the grey clouds which hung above the mountains. "What is he saying?" she asked Teddy.

"There may be rains later and the road will be difficult. No problem! *Chigger yellum!*" he added cheerfully.

Vicky had heard the phrase a few times but couldn't work out what it meant.

"No problem," he explained. "If there's a problem we say, *chigger alle.*"

"*Ishee,*" Vicky answered, using an Amharic phrase she'd learnt meaning 'okay'.

They changed places and Vicky climbed into the back seat among their bags and made herself comfortable. However, the bumps from potholes in the road kept dislodging the bags and she spent most of the time trying to keep them on the seat. Sleep seemed impossible. I encouraged her to stay awake, keeping an eye on the scenery which was becoming more mountainous and dark as the clouds gathered together blocking out the blue

sky and sun. Daniel and Teddy chatted in Amharic and, apart from the odd phrase, we didn't understand what they were discussing. I reminded Vicky of some of the interesting parts of the story of Theodros like the huge cannon he had forced some Europeans to build and had then had it transported up to Meqdela with hundreds of men pushing and pulling it. Although she was eager to see this impressive fortress that Teddy had described, Vicky was unable to remain awake.

She woke up suddenly as the car screeched to a stop on a sharp steep bend in the road on the edge of what appeared to be a huge chasm, the base covered by mist. The rain beat down on the car. There was a small group of cattle with their huge humps and long horns struggling to pass the car. They were followed by a young boy dressed raggedly holding the remains of an umbrella over his head to divert some of the deluge that rained down on him. His feet slogged through the muddy puddles of water as he passed the car, stopping briefly to look at us and wave.

Daniel tried to drive on but the wheels spun and the car started to slide on the muddy surface between rocks and grass. Vicky looked out of the window as the back of the car skidded nearer to the edge of the drop.

“Stop!” she shrieked in panic. “You’re too close.”

Daniel left the engine running, pulled on the brake and climbed out of the car. Teddy turned round to look at Vicky and grinned. “Exciting, yes?”

“No! Scary!” Vicky responded, turning to see Daniel looking at the back of the vehicle.

He climbed back in and announced that there was plenty of room, pulled the handbrake off and accelerated again. Mud spattered behind as the back wheels slid from side to side then inched forward. They were back on the road which now was nothing more than a stony deep-rutted track. Vicky wanted to close her eyes but I forced her to stay alert. The mountains on the side of the pass were sheer and high, the exposed rock cliffs at the top rose above steep scree slopes with very little vegetation apart from the occasional stunted tree and twisted bushes. They continued to rise towards the dark grey clouds, Daniel pointing out the site of Meqdela in the distance, looming high above the valley like an impenetrable fortress. Waterfalls cascaded down between vertical stone slabs, washing away the red soil and carrying it into fast running ravines which sought out the fastest way to the river far below. Some streams cut across their road and disappeared into the gorge, while others zigzagged under the car and ran downhill. There were no people or animals in sight and it was getting dark. The mountain of Meqdela with its plateau summit was silhouetted against the dirty purple sky.

“We need to find somewhere to camp,” Daniel told them. “Look out for some level ground.”

“We’ll be lucky!” Vicky snorted, but, at that same moment, they came round a corner and found a wide ledge sheltered by precipitous rocks.

“This will do. Now I’ll get the tent out of the back if you two can get the food ready in here. There’s no need for us all to get wet. You’ll find plenty to eat in that box with some bottles of drink.”

Later, sat inside the small tent with a lamp, he told them what he planned to do.

“If my calculations are correct, this was one place that Theodros and his followers passed through to reach Meqdela. A British army, led by Napier, was also marching there to gain the release of the British consul and other prisoners who were being kept by Theodros.”

“Can we go back in time to see them?” Teddy asked eagerly.

“Oh please say yes.” Vicky added enthusiastically. She’d soon recovered after eating a dish of cold spaghetti with tomato sauce and a bottle of tangerine pop.

“Well there is a problem getting the date and time exact. As we can only use the phone once without recharging it, I want to be sure that we are successful. Tomorrow we have to set off back as we need to be in Addis Ababa the next day. We should have some time tomorrow morning to experiment but I want you both to promise to go to sleep tonight while I do the calculations.”

“We promise,” both Vicky and Teddy shouted simultaneously.

“Okay. I’m going to work in the car so I’m taking the light with me. If I hear any noise you won’t be going with me tomorrow.”

Vicky and Teddy looked at each other – then nodded to Daniel. I wanted to put all sorts of ideas in Vicky’s head but decided that it was pointless getting her any more excited. For some reason I had doubts now and I was afraid to influence her thoughts. I just let her sleep and dream.

Chapter 13

At daylight, just before six in the morning, the sun was shining and Vicky could hear birdsong. Teddy was still asleep but Daniel was moving around outside their tent. Vicky climbed out of the sleeping bag and pulled some warm clothes on then opened the flap of the tent. It was freezing cold but the sky was blue, not a cloud in sight.

“Good morning, Vicky. Did you sleep well?” Daniel asked. He was squatting in front of a pile of stones on which a kettle was balanced with smoke curling round from the fire beneath.

“Not bad. I had some weird dreams,” Vicky admitted. “Did you do the calculations?”

“Yes. I think we’re going to be successful. But first we must have breakfast. Help yourself to bread and honey over there,” he said, pointing to a tray set out with food and utensils. “As soon as this boils I’ll make some tea. Any sign of Teddy waking up?”

“I’ll tell him we’re ready to go. That should make him move.”

“I am awake and I can hear you,” Teddy called from within the tent. “What did you dream about, Vicky?”

“Oh, just about your Emperor Theodros and his family. After everything you told me about him yesterday I couldn’t get him out of my mind. Did he really force his men to jump to their deaths off the edge of a cliff? That’s ghastly.”

“Yes and we may be able to see the chasm that they fell into. He was cruel at times and did some terrible things to his own people if they opposed him – burning people in their own homes and mutilating them. However, he was also very humane according to some

historians. He was strong and never seemed to tire but he was also known to be a very loving person with a great deal of charm. He was a mixed personality,” Daniel explained.

“He sounds horrible.” Vicky exclaimed.

“He was a great man.” Teddy responded.

“And today, hopefully, we may catch a sight of this sad person,” Daniel concluded.

“Now, get everything tidied away, fold up the tent and sleeping bags and get yourselves ready for our next adventure.”

Within half an hour the three of them were stood by the car, Daniel in the centre with the phone in his hand, Vicky on his right, Teddy on his left, both holding tightly onto his arms as he dialled in a date and a time. They were all nervous but committed.

Within seconds the car disappeared and they found themselves surrounded by a mass of people, horses, heavily laden donkeys and mules and dogs. The air was filled with the smells of unwashed bodies, smoke and dung that shocked their senses. Then there were the noises: shouting, crying, braying and barking. But it was the sight of the filthy men in their tattered clothes, woollen cloaks and weapons, some walking, some on horseback, which really scared them. They were talking in a language that even Daniel did not seem to recognise. Vicky glanced at him and saw fear on his face. She turned back to the frantic scene before her. Not only were there men carrying swords and spears, but behind them were women and children. She could not believe how many people there were. Thousands, stretching back down the valley as far as she could see. One large group of men could be seen hauling a huge iron cannon up the slope towards her.

“Hey is that the cannon you told me about?” she asked Teddy.

Suddenly a horse came directly towards her and she jumped aside, letting go of Daniel’s arm in her panic. “No!” I screamed in her head, but it was too late. From behind something hit her and that was the last thing we remembered.

When Vicky eventually opened her eyes we were in the gloomy light of a stone building. It was full of smoke and the strong smell of animal hides, cooked meat and fat. She looked around in distress. A middle aged woman was sat beside her, wiping her face, her dark skin glistening with sweat beneath the shawl that covered her head and shoulders. Her cracked lips moved as she murmured, “Sshh.” saying a few strange words quietly to calm Vicky.

I looked into the woman’s eyes. The shock of recognition was strong enough to take Vicky by surprise. She stared at the woman and, as she gasped, trying to regain her breath, I realised that we were in immense danger. The image of the woman went hazy and disappeared as Vicky lost consciousness again.

I had to keep her alive. I had to protect her. I had to help her recover. But I was in turmoil. Here I was, in the head of a young girl of the 21st century, and also back in a time, in a place and close to a person that I had previously inhabited. The clues should have alerted me. The mountains and the scenery that had seemed familiar. Even the stories about Theodros had stirred memories that I had tried so long to forget.

I had to work out how we could escape disaster before the fighting and carnage started, as I knew it would in the next few hours or days. Until Vicky opened her eyes again, I could not assess the situation or guide her. If she was badly injured we might be unable to

move and would have to wait, hoping that Daniel and Teddy could rescue us before battle commenced. I recalled the fear, the panic, the sight of blood, the smell of seared flesh and burning timber, the sound of screams and the crackle of the straw and flaming wood. I visualised mother's look of horror when she knew what had happened and the way she seemed to lose her grip on life from that moment. I could not survive that another time but what could I tell Vicky?

How could I make her understand that, in a former life, I had been the voice in the head of Alemayehu, the Emperor Theodros's son. He must be near at this very moment, eager to see the strange white girl who had been brought to his own bed and was being cared for by his grandmother. What would I do if, when Vicky opened her eyes, I was to face myself in that child's eyes? I had an obligation to protect her. If history were to change direction now, Vicky's own existence would be placed in jeopardy. I could not explain my predicament to her.

Nobody realises that their inner voice has a past. Some people believe that they are the reincarnation of a famous person but that can never be proved. Most of us quickly forget our past lives and concentrate on the present. Life moves on and we never go back – well not till now. It is incredible that, in going into the past, we should have returned to a time and a place I had lived in previously. I wonder if it was fate or destiny that delivered us here. Whatever it was, I had to be strong for Vicky.

I felt her shiver and heard the sound of voices around us. Gradually darkness receded and bodies emerged, their faces staring down at her in concern. Among them was Alemayehu, his wide brown eyes looking at her in astonishment. He was almost seven years old, dressed in a long white robe tied at the waist with his long hair pulled back from his face and glistening from the butter that had been rubbed over it. Behind him, grasping his

shoulders with her fingers, was his mother, Terunesh, her head covered by a shawl. I heard him ask her who the girl in the strange clothes was. I understood the language and his dialect but I could not translate this to Vicky. As she awoke she tried to sit up but the pain was too much and she slumped back on the hard straw filled mattress. Tears filled her eyes and Alemayehu disappeared in the watery haze.

“Where am I?” Vicky cried an hour or so later.

“Ask Theodros if we can fetch one of the prisoners. He may understand her.” I heard Terunesh say quietly in the language I had once known. She was still young, in her twenties, but already weakened by the events which had brought her to Meqdela with her husband, the Emperor. As Vicky closed her eyes, I caught one last sight of my grandmother and mother, and the child whose mind I had once inhabited.

Chapter 14

“What is your name? Do you speak English?” a woman’s voice asked. Vicky looked up at the woman, her flushed pink face framed by mousy coloured hair, parted in the centre and brushed back into a neat little bun. She was wearing a long drab brown coloured dress, buttoned down the front over her narrow chest, the skirt covered by a long dirty apron. Behind her the Empress’s mother and other women waited apprehensively. They seemed nervous of their new prisoner in her strange clothes.

“Vicky. I mean, Victoria. Yes I’m English. Are you?”

“I speak English. What are you doing here?” she asked brusquely.

“I don’t know. I lost my friends. Where am I?” Vicky responded weakly.

“This place is known as Meqdela. It is the capital of Ethiopia. We are imprisoned here by the Emperor, Theodros. Where have you come from?”

“I live in Manchester but I was staying with my Ethiopian friend in Addis Ababa. We travelled here with his uncle.”

“I’ve never heard of Addis Ababa but I know of Manchester. Oh I just wish I could leave here and go back to Europe.”

“Why are you prisoners here?” Vicky asked, warming to this strange woman.

“We don’t really know. The Emperor took it into his head to keep us captive with our men and children. It is now Easter and we have travelled a long way in the last six months,

sometimes in chains. We hear a rumour that a British force is coming to rescue us but we have no idea if that is true.”

Vicky was about to respond, knowing the historical outcome of events, but I convinced her to stay quiet. “They do not realise that you actually live in the future. Imagine the problems that might emerge if you let it be known that you know their fate. Stay quiet and hope that Daniel and Teddy reach us soon and take us back.”

“I hope they come and save us,” Vicky whispered adding, “Thank you. These people scare me.”

“Most of them, particularly the women, are very hospitable. They will look after you. I have to return to my prison hut now. You will be safe, Victoria,” she finished as she was led out of the hut by a man armed with a sword. She listened to the women left in the hut talking amongst themselves. Although Vicky did not understand their language, I remembered enough to know that they were discussing her name, Victoria.

“Do you think she is the British queen that Theodros has been corresponding with?” Terunesh asked her mother. “She looks far too young and, well, she’s hardly regal looking.”

“Yes, I think she is Queen Victoria,” Woziro Lakiyaye replied. “Her garments are very odd but beautifully stitched and we now know she is English.”

“Do you think I should tell Theodros?”

“No. He is too anxious at present. He could do something foolish. I will care for her and protect her.”

As Vicky closed her eyes again, I felt relief at their words. I urged her to pray for Daniel to come and rescue us before the battle commenced.

The sound of cannons woke us later that day. They were close, near enough to be terrifying. Outside the hut people were running around shouting, some crying and children could be heard screaming. Gunfire followed, each burst jerking Vicky up from the bed, her eyes wide open. Next to the bed Lakiyaye sat. She was calmly hand spinning a fine thread from a wad of wool. She sometimes smoothed Vicky's hair back from her forehead, damp with perspiration, and murmured consoling words which Vicky did not understand. Occasionally another woman would enter the hut and provide an update on the events.

The gunfire, rockets and cannons were spasmodic at first, then they were relentless. I knew the Battle of Aroge was now well underway. As news of the fighting reached those left in the fortress, women could be heard loudly wailing in distress, having heard of the death or injury of their loved ones. Others were packing their belongings onto mules and horses, or onto their backs, and abandoning their mountaintop homes to surrender to the British. I remembered seeing it the first time, puzzled by what was happening and by the concern showed by my mother who was distracted and distant as people abandoned her.

During the afternoon the heat of the day gave way to thunder and lightning, as if the heavens were trying to outdo the mayhem on earth. The rain lashed down and the sky went dark but the booming of cannons and crack of bullets persisted until the storm ended and the sun tried to reappear.

Finally, after about three hours, the news that the battle was lost reached her and the others at the end of a long wretched day.

The following morning Vicky was woken by the female prisoner wearing a coat over the same dress. “We’ve been released,” she announced. “We are going to find the British army and they will take us home. I would take you too but I think you are still too sick.”

“No!” cried Vicky. “Take me! Please, I want to go with you.”

The woman stroked her head, still bruised from the fall days earlier. “No, dear child. You will be safe here. There are still some prisoners left, those too weak to travel. The British will not go without them. God will be with you.”

Vicky grabbed her hand and pleaded, “Please don’t go without me.” But the woman was strong and removed her fingers. Then she turned and left through the narrow doorway into the bright sunshine. Vicky cried aloud then turned her face to the stone wall. While Vicky spent the morning sobbing, I listened for news. At one point there was a pistol shot and shouting.

Later Tirunesh came to her mother in tears. “He tried to kill himself. He doesn’t know whether to admit defeat or pursue this war. He’s released the prisoners and now wants to send a gift of a thousand cattle and sheep to the head of the British army,” I heard her cry. Lakiyaye comforted her as she knelt on the earth floor, her head on her mother’s lap.

During the day Vicky ate a small amount of food prepared by the women. The roasted meat, *injera* and bread helped restore her spirits and I encouraged her to see the positive side of life. “You wouldn’t be enjoying an adventure like this if you were in Manchester now. Chances are it would be pouring with rain and you would be sat in front of the TV watching a soap opera or movie. This is real life. You are part of the drama.”

She tried to stand but was still unsteady on her feet. Lakiyaye supported her as she took a few steps from the bed towards the door then sat down on the low stool near a small fire on which a pot bubbled. The smoke curled out of the door where dark clouds were massing above the thatched roofs of the stone huts.

“How long have I been here?” Vicky asked herself. I knew it had been a number of days, possibly over a week. I also knew that the danger was not yet over. Theodros was unstable. He knew he had lost this battle but was not ready to surrender everything.

On the following day, Easter Sunday, the remainder of the prisoners could be heard joyfully leaving the camp to join their other friends who had been captives, and the British army. Vicky sat by the doorway watching them go, but not one of them glanced in her direction. She was wrapped in a thick creamy coloured shawl called a *gabbi*, which almost covered her from head to foot. A huge flock of animals, cattle and sheep, was herded down the steep slope behind the prisoners. Later in the day they returned. I heard a despondent cry from the man who had sent this peace offering. His voice echoed round the houses, “Why have they done this to me?” No reply came. The thunder ripped loudly across the sky behind the mass of granite coloured clouds. Then it started to rain and a deluge swept across the mountain.

Early the next day, Easter Monday, Vicky woke. She felt stronger and, without waiting for the Empress’s mother to tend to her, she climbed out of bed and walked unsteadily towards the door. The morning sunshine glistened on the remains of frost and dew on the ground. A hare disappeared behind the building. A sheep bleated and its young lamb ran to feed from it. By one of the lower houses a dog started barking then another responded and soon their yaps

filled the air. Vicky wandered across the stony ground of the summit between the many thatched stone buildings to the edge of the escarpment.

In the distance below she could see a large group of men, numbering a few thousand, wearing cloaks, fur skins and carrying shields, spears and guns. They seemed to reach a decision for a huge number then turned towards us and started climbing back up the steep slope towards their tents and houses. We watched the remaining troop of Ethiopian soldiers facing what appeared to be a massive army that must be the British force. White tents in the distance stood out against the dark rock and metal weapons and uniform decorations reflected the sun.

Then one figure climbed on his horse and advanced towards them. I knew it must be Theodros. Holding her breath, Vicky waited to see what would happen. Then he too retreated with the remainder of his men and they started their ascent to Meqdela. Vicky wandered back to the house and sat outside on a boulder with a view of the distant British army now pursuing the Ethiopians and their leader. She felt desperate. She had no idea where Daniel and Teddy could be. They might have abandoned her and returned to Addis Ababa. They may have been captured by either side or possibly even killed.

Within half an hour the first shells landed, their blasts shaking the earth and throwing up turf and soil with the smoke. Gunfire spattered and bullets ricocheted off the stone walls and rocks. At the far end of the summit plateau, the warriors, their shields and spears held high, swarmed through the open gates into the compound, seeking shelter and running towards their family homes. Lakiyaye found Vicky and urged her to go into the main thatched house, the palace, where Terunesh was comforting Alemayehu.

When I was here before, had I been aware at that moment of this other person in strange garments entering the main room? I don't think so. My memory was hazy. I urged Vicky not look at Alemayehu. I could not bear to see his eyes again. Terunesh too was weeping hysterically and Lakiyaye went across to them and put her arms round them.

Suddenly, in a lull in the fighting, a single pistol shot rang through the air. There was a moment's silence when only the caw of a crow could be heard. Then the shrieking and wailing of women started, and the cries, shouts and even cheers of men echoed across the mountain. I knew that was the moment that the Emperor had shot himself with the pistol that had been a gift from Queen Victoria. Alemayehu's father was dead.

Chapter 15

“We’ve got to get out of here,” I convinced Vicky. “The British army will arrive soon. They will look after us.”

Leaving the small family group to their grief, Vicky crept out of the palace and looked around her at the chaos and mayhem. British soldiers in their dark uniforms and white helmets stormed into the houses, huts and tents, ignoring the distraught Ethiopians whose only wish was to surrender and leave the fortress. As they gathered together their meagre belongings, the soldiers looted the treasures in the church and elsewhere and one group pushed past Vicky to enter the Emperor’s palace. Among them was a distinguished looking man, not in uniform, but clearly with authority.

“Look after the family. They are now in our care,” he ordered as he reached the door. He glanced back at Vicky, still shrouded in the *gabbi*.

She looked up at him and said, “Thank you.”

“You speak English?” he asked, stopping to look at her as the soldiers disappeared into the dark interior of the palace.

“I am English,” she weakly replied.

“But you were not among us prisoners. Wait, I think I heard about you from the wife of one of the prisoner’s. What is your name?”

“Vicky – short for Victoria.”

“Yes, you’re the one. So you survived. She was afraid that you were too weak to travel. These soldiers will look after you,” he announced and called over two young uniformed men. “I will see you later.” He then entered the palace as she followed two Asian looking men through the streets between the houses, churches and store buildings. Many

were now on fire, the thatch catching light quickly, crackling and spitting burning straw into the smoky air. Bodies of those Ethiopian warriors who had not escaped the bullets and had not been rescued by their families lay on either side of the main track.

Near the main internal gate she saw a small group surrounding the body of one already wrapped in white cloth, a makeshift stretcher at his side. “The Emperor,” I told Vicky and she looked away then shrieked aloud.

“An elephant!”

The animal, equipped to carry away a mass of items, lumbered through the huge stone gateway with an Indian soldier perched above its head precariously swaying from side to side as it stepped over the uneven ground.

Among the many soldiers, mules and elephants were two Ethiopians, hand in hand, one dressed in the uniform jacket of the British army but without the helmet of the others. Their heads were down, the black curly hair visible to Vicky looking down on them. As they came closer I told her to look at the object in their joined hands, glinting in the afternoon sun. “Is that a mobile phone?”

“Teddy! Daniel!” she hollered – her voice no longer weak. “I’m here! I’m safe!” She started to run down the steep slope, passing the leading elephant so close she brushed its rough grey skin and caused it to bellow loudly. The soldiers who had been ordered to look after her jogged down the slope after her, holding their helmets with one hand and their rifles in the other. Soon she had left them far behind in her eagerness to join her friends.

Teddy now looked up, obviously aware of commotion higher up the precipitous route. When Vicky saw his face she squealed in delight. “Teddy! I’m coming!”

Within a few minutes, having negotiated the hundreds of soldiers and animals that were climbing past her to their final destination, she reached her friend and Daniel. Without letting go of the phone, they hugged her and cried. “We didn’t think we’d see you again. We’ve so much to tell you. Are you alright? It’s been days, even weeks, since we lost you,” Teddy babbled, gripping Vicky’s hand in his.

Daniel looked at Vicky, took her other hand, and smiled in relief. “I was so worried. I could not return without you but I was afraid we’d never see you again. It is so good that you are safe. Now we need to get home.”

“Please. Let us go now,” Vicky urged. I’m so homesick. I can’t wait to leave this place.”

“I’m sorry, we can’t do that. If I was to dial in the time and date we left we’d arrive back in the present miles away from our vehicle. It’s too dangerous. We have to return to the same place we arrived at.”

“Is that far?” Vicky asked.

“I don’t really know,” Daniel admitted. “The British army approached Meqdela from a different direction to that taken by Theodros and his troops. When we lost you, Teddy and I had to walk for about a day before we met these troops.”

“How did they see you?”

“I let go of the phone every so often and could be seen but I knew uncle was there to rescue me.”

“It’s too complicated to explain now. Just remember what happened that night I went to my father’s study. I know he saw me – or a ghostly image of me. We’re safe now. We need to find a way back from this plateau. The easiest route will be to return the way you came and drop down west, towards the Bashilo River. I have the map of the area so, providing we meet no obstacles, we should get back before nightfall.”

They started the climb back towards the summit, their ghostly figures wandering between the baffled soldiers and startled mules and elephants. They also had to avoid the multitude of Meqdela people passing them, exiting the capital with all their worldly possessions.

I was relieved that we did not meet Alemayehu, with my mother, grandmother and their new guardians. I knew too much about the fate of the child I had belonged to. I could have faced him and challenged him to change his direction in life. Although young, he might have become the next Ethiopian Emperor. That could have altered not only his history and destiny, but the future of Ethiopia. It could also have meant that I may not have become the inner voice of Vicky. That was too great a risk.

I remained silent for much of this journey, leaving Vicky to concentrate for the next few hours on the arduous trek back to the vehicle. Above us the sky darkened with clouds of black smoke as the rooftops and buildings of Meqdela blazed.

Charred remnants of fabrics and furnishings rained down on us with pages of manuscripts discarded by those soldiers looting the treasures of the capital. We walked in silence. Each had a lot to ask and say but they were all too exhausted by the events and the

effort to escape. As darkness quickly fell, they were still on the rough road leading away from Meqdela. By the weak light of Daniel's torch they struggled on, expecting to see the car round each corner of the road but then facing disappointment. They had left the people and events of 13th April 1868 a long way behind but still had not reached their present time.

Chapter 16

The sky was now dark except for a red glow behind the black silhouette of Meqdela. The only sounds, apart from their breathing and footsteps on the rough stones, were those of the river rushing through the valley far below and then there was the screech of a bird. It flew up from the road ahead of them, flapping its splayed inky wings and rising into the indigo sky, circling above them. Then, they noticed that the track skirted a small level area and there, by the rocky cliff, was the place where the car had been parked. With no moon visible they could easily have missed it.

“We’ve made it,” Daniel sighed.

“Can we rest?” Vicky asked, slumping down to her knees on the ground while still holding firmly onto his hand.

“No. There will be time to rest when we get back to the present. Now take one last look behind you and keep hold of me.”

Teddy and Vicky stood in awe, looking up at the burning fortress on top of the plateau, the sky behind it pulsating with hues of crimson, amber and gold beneath the cloud of thick black smoke in the dark blue sky. As they watched the sky lightened, sunlight caught the red rocks in the east and smoke gave way to white wispy clouds, brushing the summit, now bare of any buildings.

“We’re back,” Daniel announced and they both turned to look at him and saw the car behind him. “We’re safe.”

“Great! Can we go home now?” Vicky cried, still holding onto Daniel’s arm as she steered him towards the car.

“Please uncle. Let’s go. I’m tired,” Teddy added.

“It’s still early morning here. The exact time we left. We have been away for over a week but it is still only seven in the morning in your time, Vicky. I suggest we set off towards Dessie so that we can be home tonight. That will please Marta and Tadesse. They don’t expect us back till tomorrow.”

I suggested to Vicky that it might be dangerous driving after such a long walk.

“Aren’t you tired?” Vicky asked, yawning.

“Yes, but I want to get back to a good road. I’ll stop somewhere later and have a short sleep while you two catch up on your stories. I expect you both want to sleep now.” They both agreed to that and climbed into the back of the car pulling the sleeping bags over them.

“Where are we?” Vicky asked, waking as the car pulled up at the side of the road. Outside the window we could see cultivated land with fruit trees growing: bananas, papayas and mangoes. In the distance the mountain peaks were grey against a bright blue sky with no sign of clouds. “Oh look, camels!” she exclaimed, waking Teddy with her hand.

“We’re now on the plains between Dessie and Karakore,” Daniel announced. “I need to sleep but you two can talk. Nothing will keep me awake. If you leave the car, don’t wander far.”

“Okay!” Vicky agreed. “Is there any food left?”

“Not much. Here’s some money,” he added, pulling out some notes from his pocket and handing it to Teddy. “We’ve just passed an eating place where you can get fresh fruit and juice. I’ll sound the horn if you’re not back when I wake up. Now let me sleep.”

Teddy and Vicky wandered along the road, passing a few local people with donkeys and camels who nodded politely but were clearly surprised to see a white girl with a young Ethiopian boy. When they reached the small restaurant, situated on the edge of the road overlooking the fertile valley and surrounded by fruit trees, they were welcomed by the owner. He took them to the terrace where they waited for fresh papaya with limes and orange juice. They avoided talking about their adventure till they had finished their meal.

“I can’t believe how good that tasted,” Vicky sighed. “I think the last meal I had was stale bread and some tough meat which I don’t think had been cooked.”

“You were lucky. We had to share what I could beg from the soldiers. They were suspicious of me but gave me some of their food. We drank water from the streams.”

“I don’t remember the first few days. I must have been unconscious.”

“You fell over and then a horse kicked you. We tried to get hold of you but others saw you and dragged you off the track and put you on a mule and then you disappeared in the crowd.”

“So what happened to you? Did you follow me?”

“We tried. For over a day we searched for you. There were thousands of people. We did not know if you had left the camp and gone to Meqdele. Many had moved on, following the cannon which Theodros wanted in his fortress. Others waited below on the lower plateau. When news came that the British force was coming they moved. We knew the outcome of the

Battle of Arogi. We knew that we could be in danger if we stayed with Theodros's army. If you were taken prisoner, we would be able to rescue you when they raided Meqdela on Easter Sunday. If we tried to come sooner we were afraid that we would put your life at risk as well as our own."

"I see. So you joined up with the British forces. What was it like?"

"Amazing. There were thousands of soldiers from India and many from Britain. They had many horses, mules, camels and elephants as well as sheep and cattle. They brought guns, swords and huge cannons. I was worried that they might kill me when I made myself visible but they believed I was a local who had escaped Meqdela and Theodros's army. They did me no harm, though some seemed suspicious."

"So were you free to wander among the troops?"

"Of course. I never carried a gun or sword so I was not a threat to them. Daniel stayed close to me and I would be aware of his ghostly image sometimes. It was very strange. When we were in contact, when I held onto him, we seemed to be invisible to those around us yet we could still wear their clothes and eat their food."

"Who did you get the jacket off?"

"One of the soldiers was very sick. He was hot at first so he removed his coat. Then, when he felt cold, someone put a blanket over him. I too felt cold so I took the jacket. No one stopped me and, after that, the soldiers accepted me when I was visible."

"It is strange how the coat and my *gabbi* have disappeared. I wanted to take it home."

“Uncle Daniel may be able to explain what happened to them. They were made over a hundred years ago. Maybe they just ...What is the word?”

“Disintegrated,” Vicky suggested. “Your English has improved since we were separated. Were you practicing with the soldiers?”

“With the English ones, yes. They were amazed that an Ethiopian could speak their language. Sometimes I tried to act as interpreter when they were trying to question the other natives who were fleeing from Meqdela or who were from other parts of Ethiopia and were against Theodros. I think most spoke Tigrinyan, another Ethiopian language, whereas I only speak Amharic.”

I listened to their conversation, fascinated by the account provided by Teddy of life among the British army. From my own previous experience, I had found them to be kind and helpful when Alemayehu and his mother and grandmother were placed in their protection. I recalled the day, almost a month after we had left Meqdela, when mother’s health declined further and she died. She was buried and her mother, Lakiyaye, gave the leader of the expedition a letter for Queen Victoria requesting her to take care of Alemayehu.

Vicky was unaware of my own memories and continued to press Teddy for more information. “Where were you when the fighting took place?”

“We had followed one group of Indian soldiers in the morning down the ravine to the main river. Some rode across and, while we were there, many other animals, including the elephants, were brought down. It was hot and we were all dry and thirsty. Then we had to climb up the steep slope to the flat land below the Arogi plateau. A large group of soldiers on horses were on the top. Ahead, all we could see were the two peaks in front of Meqdela. It was silent.”

“What happened next?”

“We waited. The mules with all the stores were lined up with their drivers. Different groups of the army were in different places. Everyone just lay or stood or sat waiting. Flies buzzed around us and the horses and mules shook their heads and tails and stamped their feet but most of the men were quiet and still. I think they were scared.”

“Were you scared?”

“We both were. I clung to Daniel during the Battle of Arogi. I hoped that we would be safe if we were not visible but I was afraid that the cannon shots might blow up the ground where we were or a bullet might hit one of us. It was the worst experience of my life. It was like being in a movie film but knowing that the guns were real and the blood was real. In the afternoon we watched the first mass of warriors come down from Meqdela towards the British army which stood behind the mules. From the top of the mountain we could hear the boom of Theodros’s cannons and some of the warriors aimed their rifles at the troops and shot. Then thousands of them came down the hillside on horses or running with spears and guns in their hands. It was terrifying. I thought we were going to be killed. All the men around us waited. We could hear the singing of the warriors, their shouts and their feet on the earth. But the army just waited.

Then, suddenly, an order was given and the British started firing guns and rockets. They had fast loading rifles so the sound was deafening and went on and on and on. They fired at the warriors as they ran down towards us. I saw men stop and stare before they fell; they jerked and jumped and rolled to their deaths. Some lay screaming and crying but the gun shots and cannons boomed and spattered and made us deaf to them. Blood poured from them and covered the clothes of those who still wore them. Their swords, shields and other

weapons lay near them as others jumped over them or ran round the bodies. I can't get the sounds out of my head or the smell of burning and smoke and gunpowder. I kept closing my eyes to stop seeing the bodies and the blood but, when the ground shook with a blast I had to look. Then I saw the Indian foot soldiers with swords on their guns march on the Ethiopians who were still fighting but it was hopeless.

Above us, high in the grey sky, vultures were watching them as they flew round and round. Then the sky got darker and thunder rattled the air. When the rain came it was heavy and washed blood from the bodies onto the grass and into the streams. There were hundreds of dead men yet hardly anyone among the British army seemed to be injured. They looked strong but did not seem to have feelings. The battle went on for hours, even after the rain stopped and the sun started to light up the ground. By the end both uncle and I were crying and holding each other."

Both Vicky and Teddy sat in silence, visions of the scenes they had both witnessed clear in their minds. Teddy put his hand on Vicky's shoulder, "I'm sorry you were injured. Are you okay now?"

Vicky touched her head, which had been badly bruised. There was no sign of the bump or any evidence left of the scratches and cuts to her arm. Her skin was clear, as if nothing had happened. "I'm perfectly fine. It's as if it was all a terrible dream and never really happened."

"I know. What do you think I should tell my parents? They will be furious with us if they find out the truth."

“I agree. There is no way I could even start to explain this to my mum. She would ground me for months. Let’s see what your uncle suggests. We’d better go. I can hear the horn sounding.”

Chapter 17

The journey back to Addis Ababa was long and varied but tiring. Vicky and Teddy, still exhausted from their ordeal and the arduous journey they had already taken, dozed and slept much of the time. They also talked with Daniel about their experiences and memories of the events that they had witnessed.

“What will you tell your colleagues at work?” Vicky asked after I planted the question in her mind. I was still afraid that history may have been changed and worried about the consequences.

“I’m not sure. I need to think about it. I don’t think Teddy and I saw anything that the textbooks haven’t recorded. We saw it brought to life. You, however, saw something which has not been found in any textbooks. What do you remember?”

Vicky had briefly told both Teddy and Daniel her story - about how she found herself in the hut on the top of Meqdela recovering from her fall and being kicked by a horse. She had mentioned Theodros’s family and had known that it was the mother of his wife who had cared for her.

“When I woke up once I saw a small boy. I think he was the Emperor’s son.”

“Alemayehu,” Teddy put in.

“Yes. He was talking a woman who must have been the mother.”

“Empress Terunesh.” Daniel added. “Did they appear well?”

“Yes. His grandmother was very strong. She gave up a lot of her time to looking after me. It was only after the battle, and particularly on my last day when they must have been

told that the Emperor had shot himself, that the mother was upset and seemed to grow tired and weak. I only saw her twice after that first time when I saw them in the hut. The last time I saw her she was consoling Alemayehu. He was really upset and didn't even notice that I was stood there, in their palace."

"What was the palace like?" Teddy asked her.

"Quite basic though there were rugs on the floor and things on the stone walls. I didn't really take much notice. I only went into the first room and left as soon as I could. There were lots of other buildings as well as tents on the top plateau. As well as all the people, there were horses and mules and huge numbers of cattle and sheep."

"What about the sounds you heard when you were in the hut?" Daniel enquired.

"I didn't understand anything that was being said until one of the prisoners came to see me. She wasn't British but she could speak some English. She didn't stay long but she did come back the next day to tell me that they had been released. I begged for them to take me too but she refused."

"She must have been one of the missionary wives," Daniel observed.

"Well she wasn't acting very Christian when she spoke to me. When the British arrived on my last day, one of them who wasn't wearing uniform like the others, well he mentioned that she'd visited me. Who was he?"

"Possibly Rassam. He wasn't English but he had been working for the British government to release the consul when he was imprisoned by Theodros. I think that, with everything else going on that weekend they would soon forget seeing another English person. It's unlikely to have been reported. If we return to Addis Ababa and discover that, for the last

hundred and thirty years or so, history was completely different to that we knew when we left, we'll know that your presence in Meqdela did make a difference to the destiny of our country.”

I worried that this might be the case. I did not wish to make Vicky panic so I kept quiet in her head. We would have to wait until we returned to the city to find out what fate had in store for us. There was silence for a while then I suggested to Vicky that she pose a question. “If your presence has made a difference, ask him if there is any way that we could put things back to how they were.”

Vicky's question made Daniel laugh. “If things had changed that much we'd have known by now. I wouldn't have found the car and you wouldn't have enjoyed that breakfast with my money.”

“Yes. I suppose so,” Vicky responded, though she wasn't entirely convinced as I still silently voiced my own worries.

“Look. There is a way we can make sure none of this took place,” Daniel announced.

“How do you mean?”

“Well, when I recharge the mobile phone we could go back to any point in time. The only limitation is that we must go to the location. If we were to go back to the airport at the same time that your plane arrived, adding about half an hour for immigration, you could tell the airport staff that you'd accidentally got on the wrong plane. The events of the last week would never have happened – for you – and for us.”

“Oh, no! You cannot do that!” Teddy exclaimed.

“It’s not for you to decide. What do you think, Vicky? It would avoid all the problems that you will face when you get home. It will mean that you would not remember seeing any of us and would never even know that we had met. You would be able to live the rest of your life without the memories of the last few days. It is your choice.”

Vicky sat in silence. “It’s a possibility,” I suggested. “It would solve a number of problems. You wouldn’t get in trouble from your mum and dad. You wouldn’t have nightmares from what you’ve seen and heard over the last week. It’s not often we can turn the clock back and start again.”

Outside the sky was darkening. Daniel had stopped at road works and the rain started. Traffic was building up behind us as we waited. Big lorries, a bus and four wheeled drive cars drove towards us, their lights illuminating the rain drops on the windscreen as they ran jerkily down the glass. Vicky stared at them. Then Daniel switched on the wipers and the race between the rain drops started again. Vicky knew they were waiting for her response and didn’t know what to say. She argued with her inner voice. “I’ve had so much fun with Teddy and his family. I don’t want to forget that. I’ve grown to like him a lot. I know that the days since we left Addis Ababa have been horrific at times, especially when I was on my own, but do I want to wipe them from memory? Haven’t I changed since I came here – I’m not as spoilt and boring as I used to be, am I? If I return having never experienced the bad times, as well as the good times, I’ll just be the same Vicky.” Still she said nothing.

Daniel put the car in gear ready to move forward. He pulled the handbrake off and turned to look at Vicky in the mirror, “So, what’s your answer?”

Chapter 18

“I’ll continue with the arrangements that the British Embassy have made. I will go home the day after tomorrow,” Vicky said.

Teddy cheered and hugged her and Daniel smiled at them in the mirror. Vicky grinned. She had made the right decision. She took hold of Teddy’s hand. “I couldn’t go back and forget you,” she admitted quietly then leaned back and fell asleep again.

An hour later they were driving through Addis Ababa, its busy streets lit with traffic headlights, shop fronts and street lamps. Then they left the lights as they climbed the hill and reached their own house. Daniel stopped outside the gate and pressed the horn. The dog barked, a light came on inside the yard and the gate opened.

Within a short time they were sat with Marta and Tadesse, relating their stories – or rather, the parts they believed were appropriate for them to hear. They were all exhausted and were relieved when Marta suggested they went to their beds and finished their stories the next day.

With only one day left before she was due to fly back to Manchester, Vicky lay awake as I posed questions such as, “How will you keep in touch with Teddy?” She was aware of the gap that would be in her life when she left Addis Ababa. She had school friends back in Manchester but Teddy had been different. In spite of all their cultural differences, Vicky enjoyed his company more than anyone else she could think of, even her best friend who’d she’d all but forgotten about since arriving in Ethiopia.

On their last day together, Marta suggested that they buy a present for Vicky's mother.

"But I've no money," Vicky said.

"We know that. It will be our gift to your mother for giving us the pleasure of your company this week," Tadesse replied.

"Do you think she would like a traditional Ethiopian dress, or maybe some jewellery?" Marta asked.

"She loves bangles."

"In that case, we will go to Piazza where there are many jewellers. Tadesse, I will leave Esther with the *seratenya* and we will meet you at the restaurant for lunch. Do you like pizza, Vicky?"

"I love pizza."

"Good. Then we will eat in our favourite restaurant. Let us go."

So Vicky spent the morning shopping and had lunch with the whole family in a restaurant in Arat Kilo. When they returned Teddy told Vicky that he had a present for her.

"What is it?"

"A surprise! Come and see. It's in my room."

Vicky followed him and there, on his bed, was an envelope full of sheets of paper and pictures. 'Our adventure in Ethiopia' was written across the cover and inside there were photographs, drawings, photocopies and simple notes on everything that they'd shared since he first contacted her through his uncle's mobile phone while she was in school.

“How long have you been working on this?” she asked, looking with interest at the variety of material which now had so much relevance to her life. There were sketches of the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to the Emperor and photographs of the rioters outside the palace. Prints of images of Meqdela were accompanied by written notes to remind Vicky of the historical events that they had witnessed. There was even a photograph of Alemayehu, Theodros’s son, the child whose mind I had occupied so long ago. I now looked back at him through Vicky’s eyes.

“My mother did some of those drawings. Did I tell you that she studied art when she was at university? Since I first spoke to you, when you told me that you were doing a project on our country, I’ve been collecting information. What do you think of it all?”

“It’s amazing. It’s brilliant. Look, you’ve even managed to get pictures of your food and these people dancing. Oh, and here’s a photo of you and your family. Wow, I am so impressed.”

They sat on the bed together going through the documents, discussing some of historic places that he had originally told her about and reminiscing about those sights they’d seen for themselves. “Look, you’ve got a photograph of the student riots. Where did you find that?”

“Daniel found it in my grandfather’s diary. He said you could put it in your project. He also sketched some pictures on our trip so they’re included. There are no photos of Theodros, of course, but I hope you like the drawing I did of him.”

“It’s fantastic. You are so clever. This is far better than the project that I was doing at school. I must show it my teacher when I get back.”

“Will you tell her what you saw?”

“Only what I saw in the present. The rest is our secret. What about you and Daniel?”

“Well I’ve been warned by dad not to say a word to anyone. Uncle Daniel will report to his department what he saw. I don’t think he’ll tell them everything though.”

Vicky’s journey back to Manchester was, as might be expected, quite boring. Every time she thought about Ethiopia she got a lump in her throat. I had warned her that she had to get on with a normal life. “It may be years before you can return to Ethiopia.” I know it was cruel but, well we sometimes have to be realistic. “You’ll go there again one day and will keep in touch with Teddy and his family,” I reassured her when she threatened to cry.

She had to fly to Heathrow and get a train the rest of the journey. Her mother was waiting for her at the airport and ducked under the barrier as soon as Vicky appeared, running over to her and giving her a big hug, causing a hold up for the passengers behind.

“My goodness, Vicky, you’re looking well. I was worried you’d come back stick thin.” She hugged Vicky, both of them emotional and grateful to be back together. “Come and have a cup of tea. Our train’s not for at least another hour. I want to hear all about your adventures. Oh you are a naughty girl. But I’m so pleased to see you again.”

“Yes mum. I’m happy to be home. Let’s get out of here. Sorry,” she said, turning to the red faced people with their trolleys piled high with suitcases returning from holidays.

“I’m shattered. I didn’t get any sleep on the plane and the film was rubbish.”

“Is that all your luggage?”

“Yes. Teddy’s mum bought me a few clothes, oh, and a present for you.” She fumbled in her bag and pulled out a paper bag. “Here mum. This is for you. I’m really sorry mum,” Vicky started to cry.

“Hey, stop that dear. I’m not angry with you. Not now. I was mad when I first realised that you’d got the wrong plane but, when I spoke to the family who were looking after you, I knew you’d be okay. Come here, love.” She pulled Vicky to her and gave her another hug, then, after wiping her eyes, she put the silver bangle on her wrist. “It’s beautiful. You must ring her and thank her for me. Now we’d better get to the station. I’m parched and need a cuppa. You’ve got a lot to tell me about and I don’t want you to miss anything out.”

“You will not tell her everything,” I warned Vicky as she blew her nose and followed her mother out of the airport. She now had to adjust to her life back in Britain. It wasn’t going to be easy. One of the first things I wanted her to do was find out about Alemayehu and his life after leaving Ethiopia. Teddy had told her that he was taken back to England but wasn’t sure what happened to him after that. Vicky promised to find out and tell him. Of course I already knew his fate.

Chapter 19

“Well done Vicky,” her teacher said when she handed back their marked citizenship projects.

“This is exceptional work, especially for you. I didn’t expect you to complete such an excellent project. It’s almost as if you know the country intimately.”

“Well I did have a few days there over Easter on my way back from seeing my dad in Turkey,” Vicky admitted. “That’s why I wasn’t back until last week.”

I think her teacher thought Vicky was fantasising again but she was prepared to let it go. “Now I want you to present your project to the Lower School Assembly this Friday, then we’ll put your work on display outside the Head Mistress’s office.”

“Really, miss?”

“Yes, Vicky. You have done well and will be rewarded for that.” She handed out the rest of the workbooks while talking to the whole class. “Now students, we’re going to move onto another project this term. Substance misuse! For this I want you to work in groups to produce an awareness raising campaign.”

As the teacher continued explaining the topic to the class I bombarded Vicky’s mind with thoughts and ideas. “You could tell them part of the story – how you were actually present at the place where the Queen visited the Emperor. You don’t have to tell the full truth. They’d never believe you anyway.”

At the assembly Vicky gave a confident talk about life in Ethiopia, mainly based on her own experiences rather than what she had included in her project. The students and teachers were silent as they listened to her enthusiastic descriptions of the way the people eat, how they manage to farm the land, the different costumes that people wore and their dances,

the climate and the scenery. She avoided telling them about the history of the country apart from briefly explaining how an Ethiopian Emperor had imprisoned a British consul in the time of Victoria and an army was sent to rescue him and the other prisoners. In relating this story she finished it with a question.

“Our countries are connected. Theodros killed himself with the pistol that our Queen had sent as a gift. His son, Alemayehu, then came to England and went to school here. He died here.”

Vicky could not speak any more and the headmistress stood up and started clapping. The whole school joined in and Vicky turned to receive her certificate with tears in her eyes.

“Well done Vicky! I think you have just identified your next project. Why don’t you investigate what happened to Alemayehu? I’m sure we can support you in that project.”

“Yes miss. Thank you miss,” Vicky said as she left the stage and returned to her seat.

“Well!” I urged. “When are we going to start researching Alemayehu? I suggest you get in touch with Teddy and see if he and his uncle are interested in helping you.”

Commentary on Back in Time

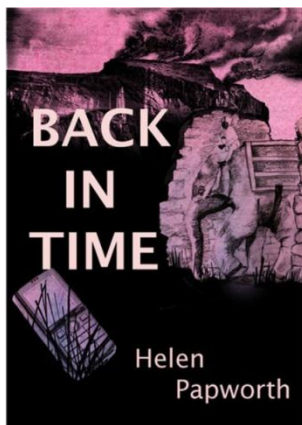
The idea for this novel emerged a year before the author commenced her PhD studies but it has changed considerably throughout the period since the original concept. The need to produce a publication or product for children based on the theme of flying led to the design of a Flash interactive game taking students on a virtual trip to Ethiopia. This was supplemented by a short illustrated novel to incorporate factual information needed to play the game.

On commencement of the PhD this idea was revised into a novel for children aged eight and above to create an awareness of Ethiopia and its culture as well as its historical links with Britain. The audience was never intended to include Ethiopian children living in Ethiopia although the author hoped that it would be of interest to children whose roots were in that part of the world. To this end the author made an effort to ensure that the context was accurate when describing events in Ethiopia.

The early drafts of the novel were shared with a number of people who had links with Ethiopia and their comments provided confirmation that the story was of interest and had potential. Those providing feedback included: Hirit Belai of HaHuBooks, her husband and teenage daughter, Michael Daniel Ambatchew (whose comments are included in appendix 1), Martha Hardy and Girma Alemayehu. The novel was submitted to an agent¹ and publishers² and following their rejections the decision was made to self-publish. A substantial amount of editing would have been necessary to resubmit to a publisher for consideration since it clearly did not meet the current market needs and, on reflection, lacked the pace of many modern children's books for eight to twelve year olds. Nor did it meet the requirements for the non-fiction genre.

Numerous edits were carried out to make it more suited to the target audience. One concern that was addressed in the text was reducing the information and concentrating on

more action in the early chapters. This coincided with the development of a blog site for the main subject of the book, Vicky, to include her illustrations (including photographs and sketches) and associated comments for a school project on Ethiopia. This negated the need for the pencil sketches that the author had produced to be inserted within the text. It also enabled the author to publish the final draft as a Kindle book which enabled her to sell the book through Amazon. Although sales were small (five to date) there were no charges for this service and the author has the flexibility to change the price, increase marketing and remove the product if necessary. There also remains the option to review and revise the book at a later date. The cover page is displayed on the Amazon websites as well as the author's own website which has links to other sites including her blog sites. The book is also included on the new HaHu website and there are links from an Ethiopian charity 'Project Pencil Case'.

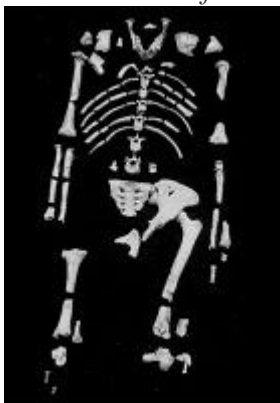


Cover of *Back in Time* on Kindle
(www.amazon.com)

Vicky's Project. The sample pages below were edited and copied onto a blog site <http://helen-outofafrica.blogspot.com/> to provide the illustrated project which is linked to the story.

***Ethiopia
In the past***

The country has a long history going back to the earliest human, Lucy. She was discovered in the north east of Ethiopia, an area which is now a hot and dry place.



Thousands of years later, at about the time of Jesus, the country became an important trade centre. Axum, in the north of the country, was also important because this is where the Queen of Sheba lived. She apparently went to see King Solomon in Jerusalem and their son, Menelik, brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Ethiopia. Whether or not this is true, every year in January all the Orthodox churches across Ethiopia bring out their copies of the Ark and celebrate Timket. Axum is also famous for the tall carved stones called stelae.



Another famous place is Lalibela where the churches are not built up from the ground but down. They were carved out of the soil and rock. This is the roof of one.

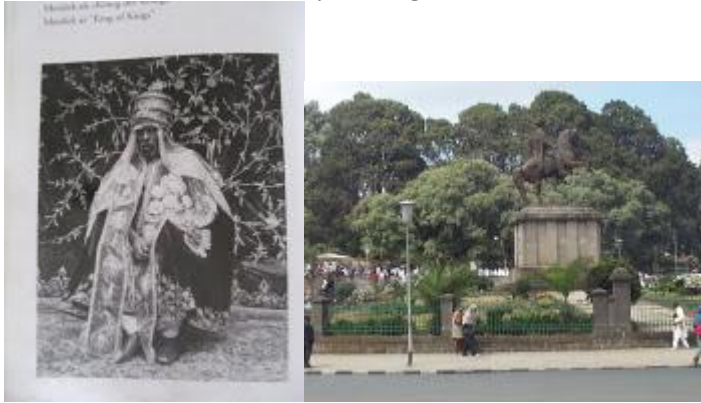
One of the most interesting rulers in Ethiopian history was Theodros II. He wasn't born a prince but studied hard and became popular with the people. He wanted his country to be strong but peaceful so he took the money from the rich and gave it to the poor. The people liked him and he grew more powerful until he became emperor of the whole country of Abyssinia (which is what they called it then). He built his capital on a hill at a place called Meqdela. He knew he needed weapons to defeat his enemies so he sent a letter to Queen Victoria asking her help. She had already given him a gun as a present.

When he didn't get a reply he took some Europeans as prisoners. He was a bit mad by then as both his wife and his best friend had died. By the time the Queen read the letter he'd imprisoned the British consul. So, instead of sending weapons, she sent him a letter ordering him to release the prisoners. When he didn't reply, she sent an army to rescue the European prisoners.



The British army was enormous with modern weapons and even elephants. Theodros and his men had some cannons as well as swords and spears. They fought bravely but they were defeated in Easter 1868. Then an awful thing happened. Theodros used the same gun that Queen Victoria had given him to shoot himself. His wife and son were looked after by the

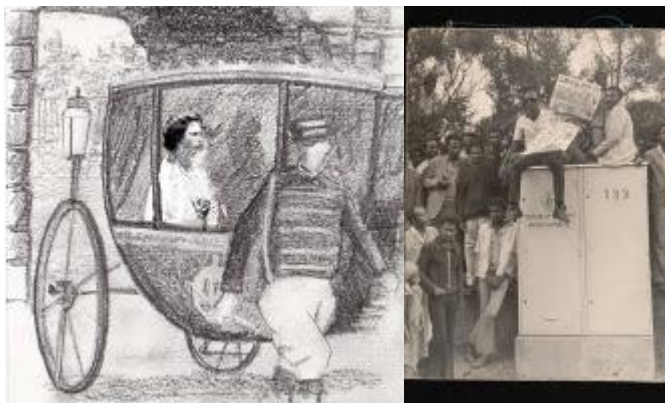
British army but his wife died on the way back to England. His son, called Alemayehu, returned to live and study in England.



Years later Menelik II became the emperor and moved the capital to Addis Ababa. He was famous for saving the country from the Italians in 1896. The Italians wanted African land (just like Britain, France and Portugal) so they tried to invade. Even though they had modern weapons, the Ethiopian army defeated them at the Battle of Adwa.



Then in 1936 the Italians decided to have another go at colonizing Ethiopia. Haile Selassie I was the Emperor then and he tried to get help from the rest of the world (he made a speech at the League of Nations) but they did not listen. He had to leave his country and move to England. In 1941, when Britain was fighting the Second World War against Germany and Italy, its army helped the Ethiopians to get rid of the Italians. (They left some things behind like Pizza). One of the really interesting things that happened in 1963 was a visit to that country by our Queen Elizabeth. She was paraded through the streets in a beautiful coach with the Emperor.



In 1974, after riots by students and terrible poverty, Haile Selassie was forced to give up power and he later died (some still believe he was killed). Instead of being ruled by an

Emperor, the people had a military government but things did not work out well. There were droughts, many people died and in the end they were defeated and the country became a federal republic. I think that means that all the regions have power but there is one central government. Anyway, things are okay at the moment though there is still a lot of poverty.

Ethiopia today



Children often have to work to earn money if they are poor. Some sell things on the street and some clean shoes. In the countryside the children have to help with the farm. Some make money by dancing for tourists.



There are some modern buildings in Addis Ababa such as Bole Airport, but this country has some older buildings, some built by the Emperors of Ethiopia when the capital was Addis Ababa such as the palace which is now part of Addis Ababa University. People live in different types of buildings - some have mud walls and some are built of stone or concrete.



The people travel round the city on buses and minibuses which carry twelve people as well as a driver and a boy who takes the money. Some people have cars which have to cope with very bumpy roads, especially when it is raining.



People eat spicy sauces called 'wat' on a type of pancake called 'injera'. They also eat lots of fruit and vegetables. After their meal many people have a coffee ceremony. Coffee is grown in Ethiopia.

There are over eighty languages spoken in Ethiopia but in most areas people understand Amharic. Here are some words in Amharic with their meanings in English.

chigger yellum - no problem

chigger alle - there's a problem

ishee - okay

woraj - there's a stop (when you want to stop the bus)

amesegenalu - thank you

tenaystilign - hello

dehna neh - how are you? (used when talking to a male)

dehna nesh - how are you? (to a female)

dehna nachoo - how are you? (to a group)

shy - tea

buna - coffee

ow - yes

ay - no

serategna - house help

¹ Gillie Russell of Aitken Alexander Associates wrote: 'I'm afraid that we're not able to offer to represent you at this time, but we wish you every success with your writing in the future.'

² Oxford University Press and Scholastic Children's Books