



*This book is dedicated to children who are lost and alone
and to those who help them.*



The day war came there were flowers on the window sill and my father sang
my baby brother back to sleep.

My mother made my breakfast, kissed my nose and walked with me to school.

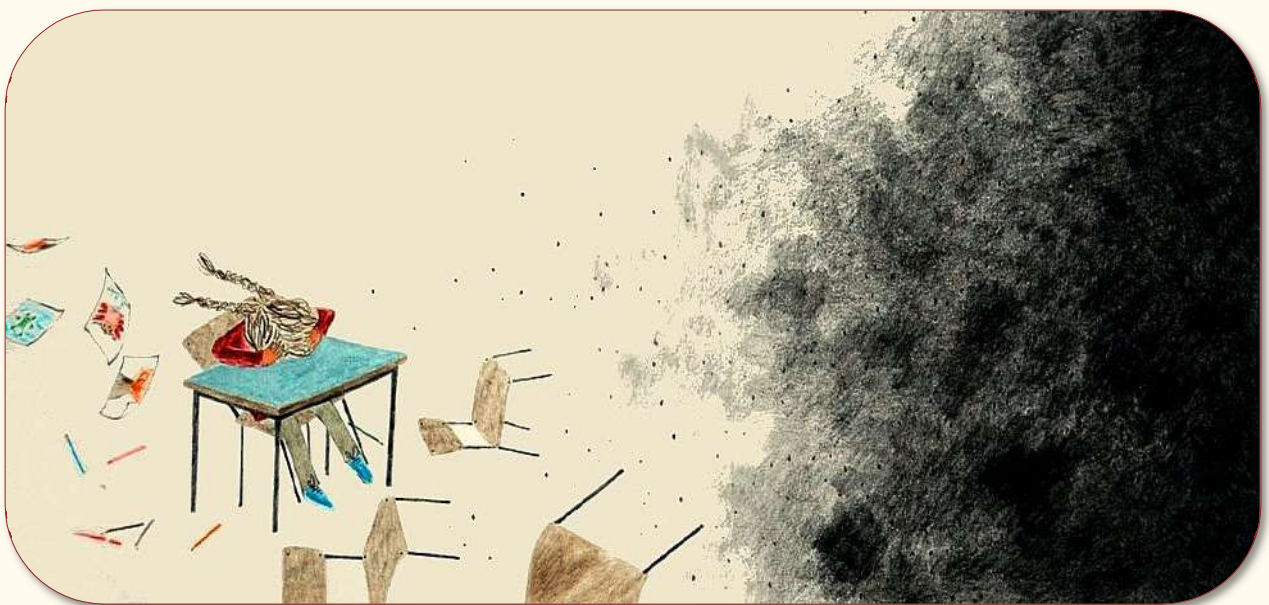


That morning I learned about volcanoes. I sang a song about how tadpoles turn at last to frogs. I drew a picture of a bird.

Then, just after lunch, war came.

At first, just like a spattering of hail, a voice of thunder...

Then all smoke and fire and noise that I didn't understand.



It came across the playground.

It came into my teacher's face.

It brought the roof down and turned my town to rubble.



I can't say the words that tell you about the blackened hole that had been my home.

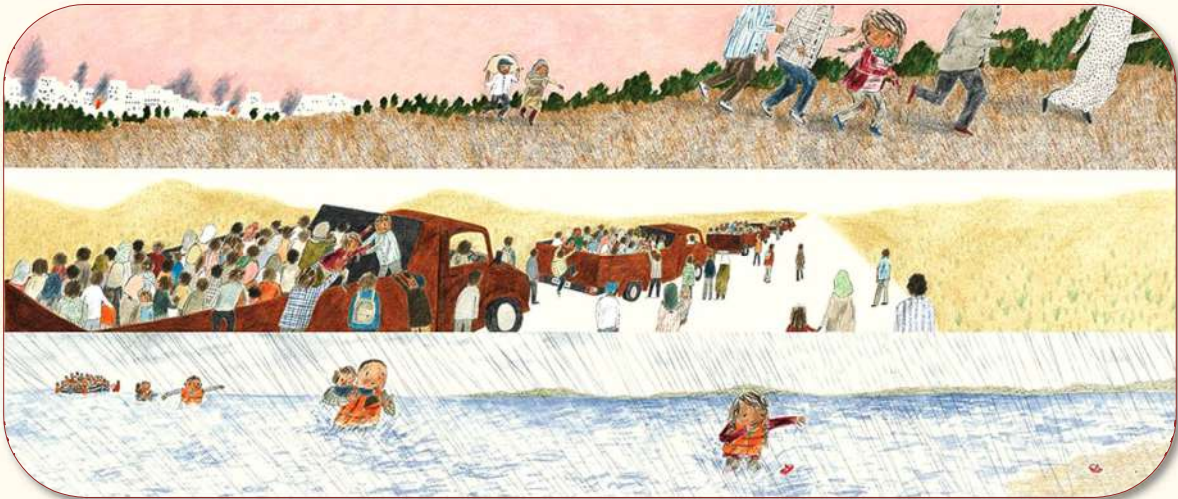
All I can say is this:

war took everything,

war took everyone.

I was ragged, bloody, all alone.





I ran.

Walked over fields and roads and mountains in the cold and mud and rain.

Rode on the back of trucks, in buses.

Went on a boat that leaked and almost sank.

Then up a beach where shoes lay empty in the sand.

I ran until I couldn't run.



Until I reached a row of huts and found a corner with a dirty blanket and a door that rattled in the wind.

But war had followed me.

It was underneath my skin, behind my eyes, and in my dreams.

It had taken possession of my heart.

I walked and walked to try to drive war out of myself, to try and find a place it hadn't reached.

But war was in the way that doors shut when I came down the street.

It was in the way that people didn't smile, and turned away.



I came to a school.

I looked in through the window.

They were learning all about volcanoes, singing and drawing birds.

I went inside.

My footsteps echoed in the hole.

I pushed the door and faces turned towards me but the teacher didn't smile.

She said: "There is no room for you, you see. There is no chair for you to sit on. You have to go away."



And then I understood that war had got here too.

I turned around and went back to the hut, the corner and the blanket, and crawled inside.



It seemed that war had taken all the world and all the people in it.

The door banged.

I thought it was the wind — but a child's voice spoke:

“I brought you this,” he said, “so you can come to school.”



It was a chair.

A chair for me to sit on and learn about volcanoes, sing and draw birds.

And drive the war out of my heart.

He smiled and said, “My friends have brought theirs too, so all the children here can come to school.”



Out of every hut a child came and we walked together, on a road all lined with chairs.

Pushing back the war with every step.



* * *

I heard a story about a child turning up at a school near a refugee camp and being turned away because there was no chair for her. She came back the next day with a broken chair and asked again. I can't remember where I heard the story but it's melded with all the other things I've heard over the last few months about refugee families and lone children. I want this story to remind us all about the power of kindness and its ability to give hope for a better future.

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The day war came
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