

Year 7 Summer Reading Challenge

Name: Form:

Due: Tuesday 2nd September 2025

Over the holiday, try and complete as many reading and writing challenges as possible. **Aim to get 30 points.** We would love to see you complete a bronze, silver and gold task, reading a variety of books in different styles & writing some of your own work too! *There are some reading suggestions from your teachers below, and these are all available for you in the school library from September!*

Bronze: 2 point each	Silver: 5 points each	Gold: 10 points each
Read a graphic story / manga novel & draw your own character	Read a newspaper article & write a short summary of it	Read a book which has been made into a film – which is better? Write out your reasons
Read an article about a footballer or music star & create a profile for them.	Read a book set in a different country & find out some facts about where it is set.	Read a book which has been made into a Netflix series – which is better? Write out your reasons
Follow instructions to make an origami shape. Bring this in to your first week.	Read a mystery story & create a story board to reveal the clues.	Read a book written in verse (as a poem) and then write a poem of your own (e.g. an acrostic using your name or your new form group)
Read a fairy tale & draw a front cover for it.	Read a biography & create a profile for the person.	Read a fantasy book & draw one of the settings
Read a Roald Dahl book & create a movie poster to advertise it.	Read a book with over 100 pages	Read a poem & create your own black out poetry.
Read your favourite musician's latest song lyrics. Can you illustrate them?	Read your favourite musician's latest song lyrics. Can you reuse one of their lines and write your own song or rap?	
Watch a movie which has been made from a book.	Read and follow a recipe. Take photos of each step.	
Create a Spotify playlist of 10 songs for a character in a book you have read.	Write a short story featuring your favourite character from a video game or TV show.	
Read a comic book & draw your own cartoon character	Read a short story & illustrate it.	
Write a biography or fact file about yourself – bring this to your first week at William Perkin.	Write a story, under 100 words, about an ancient adventure.	

Your teachers' favourite verse (poetry) books:

'One' by Sarah Crossan
'The Crossover' by Kwame Alexander

Excellent movies made from books:

Divergent
The Hunger Games
The Princess Diaries

Our favourite biographies

'Smile' by Raina Telgemeier
'Mary's Monster' by Lita Judge
'I am Malala' by Malala Yousafzai

Books set around the world:

'No Ballet Shoes in Syria' by Catherine Bruton
'Song Walker' by Zillah Bethell

Your teachers' favourite singer songwriters:

Ed Sheeran
Emeli Sande
Beyonce

Your teachers' favourite poets:

Manjeet Mann
Sarah Crossan
George the Poet
Caleb Femi

Poetry

Eternity *By William Blake*

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy
He who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise

The Magic Box, *By Kit Wright*

I will put in the box

the swish of a silk sari on a summer night,
fire from the nostrils of a Chinese dragon,
the tip of a tongue touching a tooth.

I will put in the box

a snowman with a rumbling belly
a sip of the bluest water from Lake Lucerene,
a leaping spark from an electric fish.

I will put into the box

three violet wishes spoken in Gujarati,
the last joke of an ancient uncle,
and the first smile of a baby.

I will put into the box

a fifth season and a black sun,
a cowboy on a broomstick
and a witch on a white horse.

My box is fashioned from ice and gold and steel,
with stars on the lid and secrets in the corners.
Its hinges are the toe joints of dinosaurs.

I shall surf in my box

on the great high-rolling breakers of the wild Atlantic,
then wash ashore on a yellow beach
the colour of the sun.

Listen to the Kit Wright reading his poem called The Magic Box here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/zkpmhyc>

Remember *By Joy Harjo*

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

The Language of Cat *By Rachel Rooney*

Teach me the language of Cat;
the slow-motion blink, that crystal stare,
a tight-lipped purr and a wide-mouthed hiss.
Let me walk with a saunter, nose in the air.

Teach my ears the way to ignore
names that I'm called. May they only twitch
to the distant shake of a boxful of biscuits,
the clink of a fork on a china dish.

Teach me that vanishing trick
where dents in cushions appear, and I'm missed.
Show me the high-wire trip along fences
to hideaway places, that no-one but me knows exist.

Don't teach me Dog,
all eager to please, that slobbers, yaps and begs for a pat,
that sits when told by its owner, that's led on a lead.
No, not that. Teach me the language of Cat.

Short Stories

Aesop's Fables

The North Wind & the Sun

The North Wind and the Sun had a quarrel about which of them was the stronger. While they were disputing with much heat and bluster, a Traveler passed along the road wrapped in a cloak.

"Let us agree," said the Sun, "that he is the stronger who can strip that Traveler of his cloak."

"Very well," growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveler.

With the first gust of wind the ends of the cloak whipped about the Traveler's body. But he immediately wrapped it closely around him, and the harder the Wind blew, the tighter he held it to him. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain.

Then the Sun began to shine. At first his beams were gentle, and in the pleasant warmth after the bitter cold of the North Wind, the Traveler unfastened his cloak and let it hang loosely from his shoulders. The Sun's rays grew warmer and warmer. The man took off his cap and mopped his brow. At last he became so heated that he pulled off his cloak, and, to escape the blazing sunshine, threw himself down in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside.



Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail.

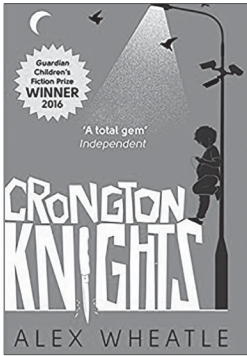
CRONGTON KNIGHTS

By ALEX WHEATLE

Crongton Knights, by Alex Wheatle

This extract comes from a novel about life on the fictional South Crongton council estate. The narrator, McKay, is walking with his older brother, Nesta, after they have been to the police station to report the theft of Nesta's bike.

Nesta is normally in trouble with the police and would stay away from them, but he has been persuaded to turn over a new leaf by his girlfriend, Yvonne.



Stop and Search

We walked back along the High Street. There were now six feds on patrol – three on either side. The Hot Rooster take-away was teasing my nostrils. Nesta was still jibber-jabbering away about Yvonne this and Yvonne that. It was funny. He hadn't said a fat zero to me about her before today. It sounds cold but I blocked him out.

A couple or so days ago Dad had bought a tray of chicken fillets that he had left in the fridge. I wanted to get back, slice and dice up a piece of prime rooster, spin some seasoning on it, chop up onions, peppers, garlic and stir-fry that mother with veg and a serious dose of Jamaican jerk. Yeah, I think there was a little bit of olive oil left to fry it in. I'd let it steam for a few minutes under some foil and get it smelling all sexy and ripe for sinking. And a pot of rice too, boiled up sweetly on the stove to go with it. Mmm. My mouth was watering big time.

'So, what do you think?' Nesta asked me as we headed towards South Crong ends.

'Think of what?' I said.

'Haven't you been listening to me, McKay? Yvonne, innit.' 'Yvonne,' I repeated.

'What about her?'

'What's a matter with you? I asked you what you think of her.'

'Oh, she seems cool,' I answered. 'But crush your balls! She has you under lock though! Go to the fed station... Speak to your dad!'

'No, she ain't,' Nesta argued. 'I just respect her.' I killed another smirk.

We rolled towards the shop in the middle of our estate cos Nesta was thirsty – I hoped he would buy me a drink too. I was wondering if Nesta was gonna step back to our castle with me, when I saw flashing blue lights about a hundred metres away – not too far from the shop.

'Step it up, bruv,' Nesta told me. 'Something's going down.'

We hot-toed to the scene. A crowd had gathered on the pavement outside the store. A fed car was parked up and Mr Dagthorn, the forever stressed-out bald-headed owner of the place, was pointing this way and that, mauling the ears of two male feds. About thirty metres away, two other feds were dragging a hood-rat off towards their car, which they'd parked a little further along the road. Collie Vulture! His hands were cuffed behind his back. Curses spat from his mouth. His bike was abandoned on the pavement. I glanced at Nesta. He was shaking his head and spitting something dark under his breath. I spotted Boy from the Hills leaning against the shop door and bounced up to him. 'What's the score?' I asked.

'Collie jacked a bottle of tonic wine from the shop but when he jumped on his bike the feds appeared out of nowhere.'

I shook my head.

'Collie was raging. He'd promised Mr Dagthorn he'd pay him tomorrow,' Boy from the Hills added.

I rewound to earlier in the afternoon when Collie asked Yvonne for a fiver for collecting me from school. It was messed up how small dramas could turn into major blockbusters.

'I've banned him from coming in here but he's always stealing from my shop,' ranted Mr Dagthorn to the officers.

'Sweets, chocolate bars, chewing gum, porno mags – I'm sick and tired of young people robbing from me. Throw away the bloody key, I say!'

Collie heard what Mr Dagthorn said and wasted no time in biting back. 'Screw you, old man. I said I'd pay for the drink tomorrow and I would have!'

The feds tried to shove Collie into the back seat of their car. Collie put up nuff resistance. 'Get in the car!' one of the feds ordered.

In trying to get away, Collie banged his head on the door handle. A red mark appeared across his eyebrow. Onlookers raged their disapproval. More people were starting to pay attention now; windows opened in the slabs above us. A council worker, wearing a yellow Day-Glo top, stopped sweeping the street and tuned in to the drama.

'Don't you ever enter my shop again,' yelled Mr Dagthorn. 'You'll probably even steal from the prison canteen!'

Someone threw a fat stone, hitting one of the fed cars on its bonnet. We all turned to see a hood-rat Usain-Bolting away from the scene towards Wareika Way.

The soles of his trainers were bright orange. I tried not to laugh, but it was well funny. The feds weren't exactly singing 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life'. Poor Collie yelped and shrieked as they slam-dunked him hard through the car door. Nesta's expression switched.

Someone threw another stone, and blitzed the front window of Mr Dagthorn's shop. A nine or ten-year-old boy laughed as he burned off through the estate, a fed hot on his heels.

Boy from the Hills and I stepped away quickly, not wanting to get caught up in any trouble.

'Everyone *calm* down,' shouted an officer.

'You see what I have to put up with!' roared Mr Dagthorn, his hands now on his head. 'You see how much respect they have for me? Do I deserve this? If I wasn't here where would they go to get their milk for the morning? I'm just trying to make a living and *this* is how they treat me!'

Nesta approached the officers who had Collie. 'If I pay for the drink he jacked, will you let him go?'

'He's committed a crime,' a fed replied. 'We can't have everybody walking into shops and taking what they like.'

'It doesn't even cost three pound,' said Nesta. 'And Dagthorn charges fifty pence more than the supermarket – freaking t'ief! I'll pay for it and, trust me, after I spill to his sis he won't ever jack from the shop again.'

I wasn't sure if Nesta had three pound on him. My own funds were low – I only had twenty-seven pence blessing my pocket.

The fed shook his head and slammed the car door. The other officer climbed into the driver's seat and switched the ignition. Nesta slapped the window.

Mr Dagthorn had stopped his ranting and was now watching my brother like everybody else.

'Nesta!' I called. He didn't hear me. The Kraken was about to be set loose. *Oh crap!*

'Can't you feds be on a freaking level?' Nesta raged, hammering the top of the fed car. 'Why arrest him for something that don't even cost three pound? Let him go! Nobody was hurt. He hasn't even touched the bottle. It can go back on the friggin' shelf.'

My heartbeat accelerated. The officer inside the car pushed the passenger door open. It smacked Nesta in the leg, nearly knocking him over. 'Why don't you move along!' ordered the fed to my brother. 'And go home!'

I could feel Nesta's rage burst. Without hesitation he ran into the fed and headbutted him dead in the chest. The officer lost his balance and fell hard on to the ground.

Someone cheered from the pavement. A girl giggled hysterically. Even the road sweeper had a smile on his face. Others stared in disbelief.

'Nesta!' I shouted again.

The feds gathered round. Two of them grabbed my bro in a hard bear hug, almost strangling him, trying to put cuffs on him. Nesta wriggled this way and that, kicked and flailed. He managed to scratch a face or two, but he was overpowered.

Everyone around me cussed the feds. A voice inside me screamed, *Don't stand up there like a pussy! Help him! Help him!*

I started off to Nesta's aid, but Boy from the Hills barged me to the ground and said, 'McKay, keep your big self still.'

My right knee kissed the concrete. 'The feds are arresting my bro!'

'And how's your dad gonna feel when news beats him that not one but two of his boys are sinking oats in a fed cell?'

By the time I climbed to my feet, Nesta was being handcuffed. All struggle left him. His chest was heaving but he was weirdly calm. I think he was staring at me. His mouth was moving. I guessed at what he was saying. He wouldn't want me to tell Dad.

They shoved him into another car. Doors were slammed. Engines were revved. I watched as he sped away. He didn't look back. The road sweeper resumed sweeping.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER by BARBARA BLEIMAN

This is a story that my mother told me, not once but several times, about a young girl called Bella. She was to become my great-aunt in the end but it was a close-run thing. It almost didn't happen and then, finally, it did.

Bella lived in a *shtetl* in Lithuania. She was a Jew, a peasant girl, living in a little village called Gargzdai or Gorzd, depending on who you were, on the edge of the civilised world, next to the Baltic Sea and in hearing distance of a clock that was ticking towards change – oh my God what change! – at the turn of the first decade of the already turned century. But she'd never see it herself, not with her own eyes. She would miss the blood dripping onto the snow and the tearing down of the houses, the cows lowing and the sheep bleating as they burned.

She said her prayers on the Sabbath, over the two tallow candles, and drank the sweet wine. She hid from the boys with their *talleisim*, their prayer shawls, and long curling locks, who laughed at her on their way to

the little *shul* that squatted on the hill. She watched them as they walked along the mud track and past the dairy farm. She helped her mother with the washing, pounding it in a bucket with a washing stick, putting it through the wringer, hanging it by the fire to dry. She learnt to cook the simple food they could afford – potato soup, beetroot and swede, dark rye bread and salty fish, smoked on wood or pickled in a barrel. She sat with her sisters, sewing coarse calico cloth and darning woollen stockings, watching her father, with his prayer book, nodding, back and forth, back and forth, muttering the Hebrew prayers she didn't understand. She saw him fling out his arm in temper and bring the pan lid down with a crack when he was angry, so the table shuddered and trembled. She felt his scratchy woollen coat, when he gathered all his children in the wide shelter of his arms, to kiss them and bless them: 'Oh my pride and my joy. May the good Lord care for you and bring you children of your own.' She heard her mother singing Yiddish songs and watched her hitching her skirts to dance to the fiddle and the accordion at Purim or Shavuot and she danced with her sisters, swinging them round and round. She watched at weddings when the bride and groom were lifted in their chairs and the men clapped and sang and the women danced and laughed and the shy young bride looked out through her veil and the proud young man smashed the ritual glass and everyone shouted 'Mazel tov, good luck, good luck. May you have health and happiness!' She saw her pimply brother becoming a man at his bar mitzvah and her doe-eyed elder sister being betrothed to Pinchas the butcher, who was twenty years older than her and had a face like an unscrubbed potato. She hid scraps of paper to write on and stole stubs of pencils to write with. She woke in the morning when the scrawny cock crowed and went to her bed when the sun slipped down below the roof of the *shul*. In short, she lived a life and she knew of no other.

'Who will you marry?' she asked her friend Sarah as they sat under the bilberry tree by the blacksmith's forge.

'Not Schmuly, with his smelly armpits,' said Sarah. 'Pooey Schmuly'. Not Shorty Isaac, the *mohel's* son, who helped his father with the circumcisions. Not Samuel with his knock-knees or Reuben Four-Eyes who was blind as Esra's grey-haired old dog even though he was still only sixteen. Not Rivka's skinny brother, or any of the Krasner boys; not the Milavetz brothers or the five ugly Plotkins, with their mule and their sulky faces. No no no. Not

one of them. The girls held their noses and screwed up their faces – yuck – and laughed and laughed. They were fifteen years old and hid behind their mother's skirts when stupid boys came to the door.

And then pretty Sarah was married, just like that, to Avram, the oldest of the Plotkins. Now she had no time to sit under the bilberry tree and laugh at silly boys. She held a raw-faced baby with a runny nose under her arm as she beat the eggs for the fruit pudding, and rocked the wooden cradle with her foot as she twisted hanks of wool or sorted buttons. She was a woman with a woman's cares.

Bella wondered when she would be married and which of the Krazners or Milavetz boys or four ugly Plotkins she should hide from when they came knocking on her father's door. But none of them came and the years went by and Bella's sisters and brothers flew up and grew away and Bella was left at home, spending her evenings watching her father nodding over his prayers and her mother nodding over her knitting.

Then one cold evening, when the ice hung from the eaves and the branches of the lime tree were broken and bowed with heavy snow, there was a knock at the door. It was Moishe, the matchmaker, come with a proposition. Pa and Ma's sleepiness vanished, despite the blackness of the night and the fug of warmth from the fire. They sat up straight as wood.

'I have a match for your daughter. He's a boy, oh my God, what a boy! And what a family! And what an opportunity for the girl, who isn't, let's face it, so young any more.'

Ma opened her mouth and shut it again.

'But where does he live?' asked Ma, hoping for a *shtetl* to the south, so she could borrow a cart and go and visit, whenever she felt like it. Already Ma was thinking of the grandchildren and the *naches*, the joy they would bring, and helping to rock them and wean them and knit their coats and sing them her songs.

'Ah,' said Moishe. 'Ah.' He paused and sighed. 'I'll have that cup of warm milk that you're offering,' he said.

'Not over the hills to the North and Plungé,' said Ma. 'We couldn't accept that.'

'No,' said Moishe. 'Not over the hills to Plungé. But a little way away,' he said, sipping on the warm milk. 'But let's not worry about that for now,' and he proceeded to tell them about the boy, Solomon Schachat, son of Samuel, grandson of Abraham, great-grandson of Chaim, who used to live in the village many, many years earlier. 'A catch,' he said, 'Money, there's plenty! A rich young man, so rich he keeps his money in a bank. She'll be drowning in it. No rough woollen coats for her from now on. Cashmere and silk, she'll be wearing. Pearls and fine jewels. Not the stink of the *shtetl* for her.'

Pa stroked his beard. 'Mmm,' he said. 'Mmm.'

'Here is a photograph,' said Moishe, at which point Bella jumped up from the bottom step where she was sitting and ran over to take a look. She saw a fine-looking young man, with a starched collar and a dark woven suit. He had bright eyes and a hint of a smile, despite the customary formal pose for the photograph.

'Yes,' she said. 'I want him.' And that was that. Pa and Ma shook hands with Moishe, Bella clapped her hands together and spun round the room, as pleased as the cow when she'd just been fed.

'So which village does he live in?' asked Ma, hugging Bella to her. 'Cape Town,'

said Moishe quietly and as Ma opened her mouth to scream, 'You must give her this chance,' he said. 'Her whole life will change. She will be rich.'

And so, one early morning, before the cock crowed, or the cow was fed, before Sarah Plotkin had woken to give her fifth son his feed, or the rabbi had woken from his bed to say his early-morning prayers, Bella was climbing into a cart that would take her to a station where she would board a steam train that would take her to Libau, where she would find a man who would escort her to the docks, where she would climb the gangplank onto a steamship, where she would spend three weeks crossing the oceans in the cheapest cabin available, being sick in the washbasin or over the side of the ship or into the bin in the cabin she shared with three other women, of various sizes and smells and dirty habits, who took out their teeth at night, or picked at the snag of a toenail, or left the door open when they sat on the toilet, and where she would wake up one morning and look out from the deck at a ruffle of land, with a flat-topped mountain that looked like a table, which she would watch approaching and feel her stomach heave like

curdled milk pudding as she realised that somewhere on that shore was the good-looking young man to whom she would be married, and the house and family that would become her own.

A month later and Bella is back on the same steamship, doing her journey in reverse, returning to Libau, back to her ma and pa and Gargzdai. She is standing on the deck watching the flat mountain turn grey and misty and the ruffle of land become a shuddery blur. What can have gone wrong? Before the ship has left the docks at Cape Town, a letter arrives for Sarah Plotkin, the only letter she has ever received in her life, the only one she will ever receive, brought to her by Pooey Schmuly who doubles as the postman when he's not helping his father in the fields. When the littlest Plotkin is off her hands, having his afternoon nap, she takes the letter into the outside shack that stands for a toilet and reads it there, where she knows she will not be disturbed by the rest of her children.

'Oy vay, oy vay,' Sarah whispers to herself as she sits, struggling to read the words in the little beam of light that squeezes through a crack in the wood.

Dearest Sarah,

My letter will come as a surprise. I am coming home. Please tell my ma and pa, so that I don't have to. You will want to know why, so I will tell you and you can weep for me, as I know you will because you are my dear friend.

Sarah reads on, ignoring the cries of her children arguing over their hoop and ball. Then she dries her tears on her apron, folds up the letter, runs into the house, grabs the little ones, puts on their heavy coats one by one and herds them like sheep towards Bella's house at the other side of the village.

When Sarah arrives Bella's parents are lighting candles for the Sabbath. 'She's coming home,' cries Sarah.

When Bella's ma has been revived with a small glass of wine and Bella's pa has stopped swearing and cursing and is finally calm enough to listen, she tells them the story, reading out passages from the letter as she goes.

I was met at the docks by the whole family, all lined up – Solomon, his ma and pa, the five older sisters, their husbands and their children. I knew him straightaway from the photograph. He was fine, oh so fine and he kissed my hand.

But his family were not friendly, not at all! The parents looked me up and down and went silent. They drove me in a car to the house of a cousin. And I've been staying there on my own, waiting for Solomon to visit, waiting and waiting for the invitations to meet the nephews and

nieces, the aunts and uncles, and for the rabbi to call. The cousin has been kind, telling me to be patient. Soon everything will be clear.

And now it is clear. Yesterday Solomon's mother came, with two of her sisters, all dressed in black. We sat in the parlour and she told me the decision. I am to go home. There will be no marriage. I am given no reasons.

'May they rot in hell,' says Bella's ma.

'May they shit blood and pus', says Bella's pa.

Sarah waits for the curses to subside, then continues. 'She cried and cried and begged to see Solomon but the mother refused. She said there was no point. He wasn't for her. She told Bella that they'd pay for the crossing and give her a small sum of money to cover her expenses.'

Sarah sifts the pages of the letter. 'Here,' she says, reading again:

His mother told me, 'Your parents will not be out of pocket. The next boat with a free berth sails in two weeks' time.' I cried, Sarah. How I cried. But yesterday evening there was a knock at the front door. It was Solomon. The cousin left us alone for a few minutes and he told me that he had begged for me to stay but his mother and father were determined. I must go. I asked him what I had done wrong and he told me I had done nothing. There were tears in his eyes. Then he shook my hand and hurried away.

So now I am writing this letter to you and I will hand it to the cousin and ask her to post it to you. I hope it reaches you before I do. Tell my parents that I did nothing wrong, that I have nothing to be ashamed of.

Your ever-loving friend Bella.

Bella's ma weeps loudly.

'May all Pharoah's plagues be visited upon them,' she says. 'May leeches drink them dry,' says Pa.

By the time Bella returned, her parents had already received another visit, from Moishe the matchmaker this time, bringing a formal letter from the Schachat father, with a large banknote enclosed. Moishe was not known for his tact or taciturnity, so the full story of why Bella had been sent home was already out all over the village and Bella was the very last to hear. Ma and Pa came to the station to meet her. They put her trunk in the cart they had borrowed and snapped the reins. As the old horse trotted slowly back down the familiar tracks, they told her the truth. And it was just as well to let her know, before she heard it from the children playing in the dirt or the silly boys off to shul, with their smirks and their whispers.

'Bella's legs, Bella's legs,' they laughed. 'Bella's thighs, Bella's thighs,' they shouted in the shul yard, 'Bella's fella likes 'em thin,' but Bella had shut herself up in her room

where she wouldn't have to hear.

'How could it be?' asked Sarah, a few weeks later, when Bella had finally decided to show her face again. 'They'd seen the photo, they'd said yes.'

'Ah,' said Bella. 'In their letter to Moishe they accused him of tricking them. The photographer from Plungė had schemed with him and my parents to show just my shoulders and face. I'd bewitched their son with the beauty of my face but my legs, they said, were as thick as tree trunks.'

Sarah shifted the little Plotkin over, to let him sleep more comfortably on the other side. 'But aren't you glad Bella, to be back home with us again and away from these strangers and their cruel behaviour? I always thought a Jew is a Jew and a *shtetl* Jew never changes his ways. It's deep down in his soul. But how wrong could I be? These Jews have travelled across the oceans to another world and they have forgotten who they are.'

'Yes,' said Bella. 'You're right,' she said but her voice was sad. 'He was so fine,' she said. 'Such a smile.' She wiped away a tear and then, 'But that's all done now and we won't ever mention it again.'

And that's what Bella planned. She was all ready to forget her long voyage out to a foreign land and her long voyage back again. She was glad to be back with her family for the Purim festival; she looked forward to collecting bilberries to make jam. There was work to be done helping her mother and she tried to put her mind to good things – a bar mitzvah, a dance, a trip to the river with her nieces and nephews, visits to the Plotkin home. She would remain in her parents' house and she would never marry. But perhaps she could live that life, without too many regrets.

Bella was settling back to life in the *shtetl*; the little boys had grown bored of their teasing and the taste of her bilberry jam and her home-made poppy-seed cakes made it hard to carry on laughing behind her back. She was Bella, the girl they'd known all their lives, after all. The one thing that she was touchy about was the subject of marriage. Ma had raised it a few times. There was a boy in a village nearby who was turning thirty, a nice boy not a *nebbish*. What did she think? She stormed off to her room and slammed the door.

One day, when she was washing sheets in the yard, pounding them hard in the bucket to make them white, she saw Moishe the Matchmaker walking down the road. A curse came to her lips but she held it back. It wasn't his fault after all. Instead of walking on past her house, he stopped and opened the gate.

'Good day to you Bella,' he said. 'Your ma it is with whom I wish to speak.'

She stood sullen and silent and pointed the way to the front door. She wanted to shout, 'No I won't marry the boy who's turning thirty from the village down the road and I won't marry any other *grober* or *schlemiel* that you've got on your books,' but she kept her mouth shut.

She hung the washing up to dry, then took herself off to the river, to sit by the bank and think. She lay down on the grass and stayed there like that for the rest of the afternoon. As the sun finally set below the trees, she picked herself up, dusted the grass from her skirts and trudged back to her house on the other side of the village.

Ma and Pa were sitting in the kitchen waiting for her, their faces pale with worry. 'There's been a letter,' said Pa straightaway. 'They want you back.'

Bella sat on the bottom step and put her head in her hands.

'It's the boy,' Ma said. 'He isn't happy. He's told them he wants you back. It's you he wants to marry.'

'He's pining, they say. He's losing weight. They're worried about their boy.'

Bella didn't look up.

'Of course, we said no straightaway,' said Pa. 'You're not just a parcel to be sent backwards and forwards, a piece of freight. A flat rejection we gave. So that's that.'

Bella looked up. 'The boy, you say?' she said. 'It's the boy who wants me back?'

'A three-week journey across the world and back again and they have the *chutzpah* to ask you to return? They must be *meshugeneh*, mad people! Are their heads in their *tokheses*?'

'I'm going,' she said. 'When's the next sailing from Libau?'

And that's how Bella became my great-aunt. She climbed onto a cart in the marketplace at Gargzdai that took her to the station, from where she took the steam train to Libau and crossed the oceans in a slightly more expensive cabin (negotiated by Moishe) and walked down the gangplank at Cape Town once again, to be greeted by Solomon Schachat, who bowed down and kissed her hand.

After the wedding, a small ceremony with just the family, she settled in a house in Vredehoek. My great-uncle Solly devoted himself to her. They had three children and they were happy. When she talked to the children of her life in the *shtetl* and her journey to Cape Town, there was only one voyage, no more. And they were glad, for they knew that her travels across the oceans had given them life and had carried her away from a world where her ma and pa, her brothers and sisters, her friend Sarah Plotkin and all the little Plotkins would have their houses and haystacks burned and their blood spilled in the snow.

Use this space to complete some of the written tasks

Use this space to complete some of the drawing tasks