

6 I say goodbye to Inspector Nikos. I am sure that he will do nothing at all to find my father. He promises to tell me the moment he has any news and writes down my mobile number, but I don't expect to hear from him again. As we go through the main office, I see policeman number one with an elderly American.

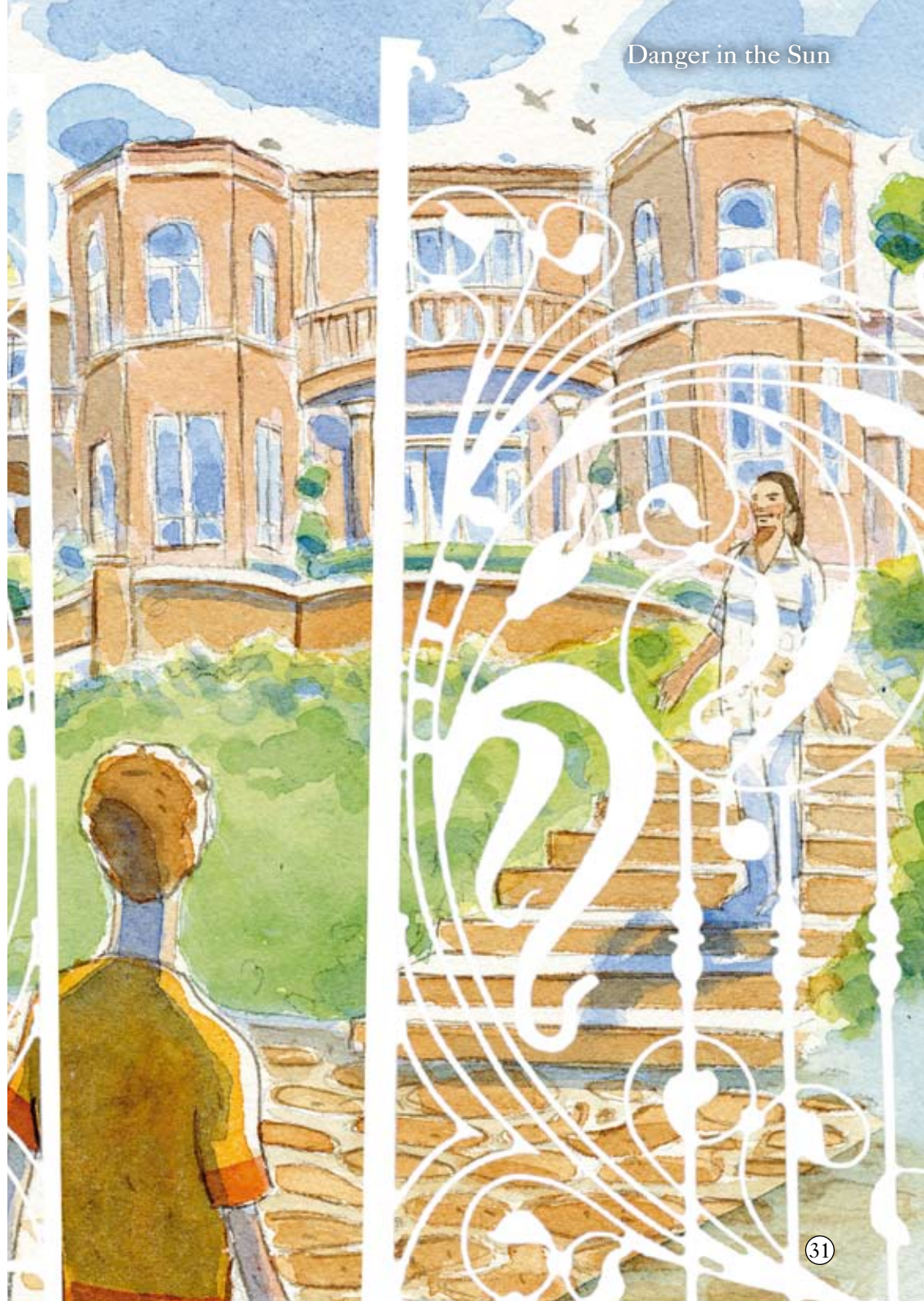
"I just went out for a short walk," the American is saying. "I know there was some kind of sign near the hotel. And there was a café on the other side of the road." The policeman is trying to look patient. He waves at me as we go past. "I hope you find your father," he says.

Another policeman takes me in to the hotel, where I collect my luggage and Dad's things and pay for the room. The receptionist says how sorry he is and sounds as if he really means it. Then we drive to the British Embassy, which is this massive building inside a walled garden. This is going to be awful, I think. I've only got some jeans and T-shirts with me and I'm sure it's the kind of place where everyone wears suits. This whole trip is a disaster, I think. But just as I walk towards the steps I see a tall slim woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a pair of very grubby jeans and a huge white shirt covered in smears of red mud.

"Hi," she says. "You must be Jake. I'm Susie. Come on in. You poor boy, what a nightmare. And so unlike Alex. I simply can't think what has happened to him. But we must be positive; it's probably some work thing. Anyhow, you're very welcome here until we get everything sorted out."

### Glossary

- **awful:** terrible
- **grubby:** dirty
- **massive:** very big
- **mud:** wet earth
- **nightmare:** terrible experience (literally a bad dream)
- **smears:** marks
- **unlike:** not what he usually does
- **walled:** with walls around it
- **waves:** moves his arm and hand to say hello or goodbye



She's so friendly I feel as if I've always known her.

"Natalie will show you around". She's only been home from boarding school herself for a couple of weeks. Nat!" she shouts over her shoulder. "Natalie's our daughter," she continues. "Now, come in don't just stand there."

We go into a grand entrance hall which is all pillars and marble, like going into a palace. The ceiling has pieces of decorated plaster like a wedding cake and everything echoes.

"This is probably the only great formal house left in this part of Athens," Susie continues as she walks, "apart from the Benaki Museum. Costs a fortune to heat in the winter, but at least it's cool in summer. Churchill came here you know in 1944. When he was trying to make sure that Greece didn't fall under the control of the Russians... Nat thinks it's haunted... don't you, darling?" This last remark is again shouted over her shoulder. "Ghosts and ghouls. Ghouls is what she calls the other ambassadors." I follow her down a long corridor wondering if she ever stops to breathe.

"Are you hungry?" Susie asks me. "We tend to have lunch late. I like to get most of my work done in the mornings. Did John tell you? I'm a potter. I've got a show coming up next month so I try and find as much time as possible. Here we are..." she finishes, as we

step inside what looks like an English farmhouse kitchen with a huge pine table and a couple of ancient armchairs occupied by two fat and contented cats.

"This is where we live. I'd have all our meals here if it was up to me. But we have to fly the flag and do the formal stuff a few times a week. But you don't have to dress up and chat. Nat refuses and I tell her she's right. No one pays her to be the embassy daughter. So she eats in here – when she's in, that is. She's often out in the evenings, clubs and cafés. You know what it's like."

## EMBASSIES AND AMBASSADORS

What is an embassy?

Why is it important?

Who is an ambassador?

Imagine growing up in an embassy. What would it be like?

How would it be different from your life now?

No, I want to tell her. I have no idea what's it's like to grow up in an embassy and go out clubbing with other embassy brats. I live in Chesterfield, which is not exactly the club and café capital of the world. In fact it's probably so far off Nat's social radar that she doesn't even know where it is. I know I am going to really dislike Natalie.

### Glossary

- **boarding school:** school where the students live
- **Churchill:** Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain during World War II
- **fortune:** lot of money
- **ghouls:** evil spirits
- **haunted:** with ghosts
- **plaster:** white substance used to cover and decorate walls
- **potter:** person who makes ceramic vases, etc.
- **show you around:** show you where everything is

- **brats:** rich spoiled young people
- **clubbing:** going to night clubs
- **far off:** distant from
- **fly the flag:** represent your country (they are ambassadors so they must have official dinners, etc)
- **pine:** type of wood



And then she walks in. Have you ever seen a race horse walk into a paddock? It looks all shiny as if everyone has been polishing it for days, and it's perfect and beautiful and it looks completely right. It belongs in its space. That's Natalie. And she smiles at me and her smile makes me feel that she's really happy I'm there. And I know that whatever else happens to me in my life, I want Natalie as a friend.

"Hi," she says. "So you're Jake. I expect Mum's been telling you a hundred things all at once and you can't remember one of them."

### Glossary

- **paddock:** place where you show racehorses before a race
- **polishing:** shining

I grin. Actually I think I'm already grinning. Like the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. I know I look a complete idiot.

"You look just like your father," Natalie says.

"Do I?" I ask.

"Well, younger..." Natalie laughs. "Like some coffee? Or tea. We have to have tea for all the upset Brits who wash up here. A cup of real English tea is what we always give them to calm them down. It's remarkable how effective it is."

"Coffee's fine," I say. Natalie starts to pour water into one of those complicated Italian espresso things that you screw together and I can't stop thinking how graceful she is when she moves.

"Um... Natalie..." I begin.

"Nat," she says. "Only strangers call me Natalie."

She doesn't think of me as a stranger!

"Do you know Alex, my father?"

"Of course," says Nat. "We've got a holiday home on Crete and he often comes to stay. Ever since I can remember. I've always known him."

- **grin:** smile widely
- **screw together:** turn two pieces together so they become attached
- **upset:** sad and anxious
- **wash up:** arrive; come

So why didn't he bring Mum and me to Crete? I'm wondering. Nat makes us both coffee and we push the cats off the chairs – much to their disgust – and slump down•.

“So what are you going to do?” Nat asks me.

“What do you mean?” I say. “What can I do?”

“Well,” she demands. “Aren't you going to look for your Dad?”

“No,” I say. “How can I? It's up to• the police.”

“And do you think they're really going to set up• a major investigation?”

I don't. I have the feeling that now they are rid of me•, they are going to do nothing at all. My own opinion is that they are quite certain that Alex Wyatt did not want to spend the summer with his son and has gone off to some island with a girlfriend. In fact they are probably laughing about it right now. But I don't say any of this to Nat, who I'm beginning to like a little less.

“Well,” Nat continues, curling• her impossibly long legs under her. “Do you?”

She may be beautiful, but she is beginning to annoy me.

“No.” I tell her. “Of course not. I don't think the police will do anything.”

**Glossary**

- **curling:** bending
- **it's up to:** it's their job
- **set up:** start
- **slump down:** sit in a relaxed way
- **they are rid of me:** I am away from them

“So?”

“So what?” I say. “What can I do?”

“Investigate yourself,” says Nat.

She's either bored or mad.

“Really,” I say in my deepest voice, trying not to squeak•, though I am not very successful. “And how do you suggest I do that? I've been in Greece for less than a day. I don't speak a word of Greek and I don't even know what my father looks like.”

“You don't know...”

“No. I haven't seen him for five years. Satisfied?”

**SURPRISING NEWS**

Jake's news surprises Nat.  
 How do you think he feels?  
 How do you think she feels?  
 Have you ever said or heard a piece of surprising news?  
 Describe what happened.

- **squeak:** talk in a high voice