

Two Different Worlds, One Home

Dearest Family,

I hope my letter finds you are safe and well. My long journey is finally over. My sister and I are now settled in the UK and I wanted to tell you a bit about my life here. I used to love playing at home. The sun was always so hot and the sky clear of clouds. Back when it was safe, we could play in the roads until the sun set and never had to worry about anything. There was only one car in the village to watch out for and you could hear it banging from miles away. It is still fun to play here in the UK. We go to the park nearly every day and the grass is so green. You would never believe how beautiful everything is. We have to play in the park instead of the road because it seems like everyone here has a car. There are swings that let you feel like you are flying and slides to whizz down. I miss my old home where you would all visit us. No windows to hold in the heat and the cool breezes blowing through. I remember lying on the flat roof, staring up at the night sky, trying to count all the stars. I never got far before drifting off to sleep to dream about starry giants and warriors.

My house now is very different. It is so tall that I can't even see the roof from the street. Also, it isn't just one house. There are lots of what are called flats, piled on top of each other. I can't lie on the roof anymore but I can look out over the city lights, which shine as brightly as the stars and there are too many of them to count. I love the city at night time. A visit to the shops used to be a surprise during the conflict. Sometimes they would have what you wanted but more often than not, the food trucks couldn't get through. It didn't matter though because Mama still made the tastiest bread from the wheat Daddy grew. It tasted delicious with some of the olives from the trees behind the house.

Shopping in the UK is still strange for me. You can go to shops that are huge and buy everything you need all in one place. There are rows and rows of shelves with food from everywhere in the world. I am trying to be good at trying new things. People love something called fish and chips but I'm not sure about it. I think I'd rather have Mama's bread and olives but who knows what I might try next?

Have they started rebuilding the school yet? I hope they have. I hated it when we couldn't go anymore. My reading was getting really good and I wanted to show Jaddi how well I could work out problems. He always loved giving me puzzles to solve. I have started at school over here now and it is going well. The lessons are hard because I don't always follow what is being said. The teachers speak so quickly. But I am getting better. I'm not the only person in my class who comes from another country so the teacher uses lots of pictures and games to help us learn. I love my classroom! It is so colourful and I get my own desk, pencils and books. Can you believe it?

Did you have all of the family over last week for Ranim's birthday? If you had all our crazy cousins, aunties and uncles over, there would have been no room at all. I do miss having my family nearby. There was always someone to talk to, play with or cuddle. I hope they are all safe. It is different just having Mama, Daddy and Amena here but good. We spend lots of time together, just the four of us. Amena and I share a room so she is never too far away. Daddy has to work for most of the day, but when he comes home, he always finds time for me. I have got to know the people in the flats next to ours and they have all been so kind since we arrived. Keisha, who lives in the flat below ours, even lets me borrow her bike. I love the feeling of freedom; the chilly wind on my face and the clattering sounds of the street blurring.

Some things haven't changed very much at all. Mama still looks after us all, like she always does, making sure we have clean clothes, clean teeth and full tummies.

Daddy was able to get a job, growing crops like back home. He has to take a train very early in the day, out of the city as there is nowhere to grow wheat here, but he is happy. You know Daddy; never happier than when he is out in the fresh air, surrounded by nature.

I bet you want to know about the weather. Is it as bad as everyone says it is?

Well, it isn't the same as home. I remember when weeks and months would go by without any rain. The sun was always there to greet you when you woke up in the morning and see you to bed at night. There was nothing quite like splashing in the river and climbing onto the bank to let the sun dry your moist skin.

The truth is that the weather is not very nice. Sometimes, you might not see the sun for days! It is cold but I am getting used to it. Anyway, it means that I have lots of new things to wear. My coat is thick and soft, and it keeps me toasty-warm even on cold days. I love putting on my welly boots and splashing in puddles, sending the rain water flying all over Daddy. He pretends to tell me off but I know he enjoys it just as much as I do. They say that we might have snow soon - my first snow.

The nights are probably the strangest thing about living here. I was used to a simple wooden bed with nothing more than a thin sheet; anything more would have been far too hot. The shutters would be open and the gentle wind would softly roll over me as the day began to cool. It was so quiet until the bangs and shouts would start. I don't miss them at all.

Living in a city is quite the opposite. The city is never quiet. There are always car horns blaring or people shouting and laughing. The old people above us can't hear very well so have their TV on very loudly. Sometimes, it sounds like they are in our house, not theirs. It took a while but I like the noise now. I think I'd miss it if it were gone. Also, my bed is my favourite place. The sheets are so soft and I feel like I disappear into a wonderful pillowy place when I am in it.

I wanted to tell you more but I will write again soon. I hope you will be able to join us in the UK if you can get here safely, or that I will soon be able to come home to the life I lost.

All my love,

Maya