

The boy and the old man arrived at the port at night.

There had been cloud in the sky but now the moon shone brightly and they stood in the shadow cast by a row of terraced cottages that lined a cobbled street, polished through the years by wheels and feet and the hooves of horses.

The boy held the old man's hand.

The air smelled of motor oil and charred timber. At the far end of the street, the quayside was lit by a bright white lamp that glared upon the skeleton of a single black crane, its hook hanging solemn above the cottage roofs, and above the crane loomed the tall ship, a string of yellow bulbs along the rails of its upper decks as though it might be Christmas and not a warm autumn night.

The boy sneezed loudly.

'Shhh, Malik,' hissed his grandfather.

Malik let go of his grandfather's hand and pinched his nose through the white cotton handkerchief that covered his face – his grandfather had tied it across his nose and mouth to protect him from smoke. Malik could have removed the cloth, since they were a long way from the fires, but he kept it, believing it made him look older. He held his breath

so that he wouldn't sneeze again. When he was certain, he took his hand away. 'Sorry, Papa.'

Papa settled a hand on Malik's shoulder. 'No. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bite.' He glanced back down the road behind them. 'I'm still nervous. I'm sure there's no one here, but we ought to be careful.'

'Careful as a cat,' said Malik.

'Fearful like a fox,' said Papa, and he adjusted the rucksack that he carried slung from a single shoulder.

Malik nodded. He felt sorry for the foxes – nobody ever had a good word to say about them.