Identity and belonging

Extract from *Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman

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**A story of adventure, ball control and hope**

***Jamal and Bibi have a dream. To lead Australia to football glory in the next World Cup. But first they must face landmines, pirates, storms and assassins.***

***Can Jamal and his family survive their incredible journey and get to Australia?***

***Sometimes, to save the people you love, you have to go overboard.***

‘Jamal,’ whispers Bibi. ‘How many days have we been on this boat?

Her head is heavy against my arm. I open my eyes. The sunlight sears in. I squint down at her face. It’s wet with perspiration. She’s got a fever.

‘How many days?’ she whispers again.

I wipe her face with Rashida’s spare T-shirt.

Five,’ I say. ‘I think.’

‘Six,’ murmurs Rashida, sitting hunched on the other side of me.

‘I was going to say that,’ mutters Omar over her shoulder.

I know why Bibi’s asking. The food and water on the boat ran out this morning and she’s wondering how many days left till we get to Australia. Trying to work out if we can survive.

I’ve been doing the same.

The answer’s three and I don’t know if we can.

A lot of the people sitting on this deck look as though they feel the same way. I’ve never seen so much despair on so many faces.

I wipe Bibi’s face again.

‘Try to forget which day it is,’ I say to her. ‘Just try and rest.’

‘I don’t want to forget which day it is,’ says Bibi in a tiny voice. ‘It’s my birthday.’

I stare at her, my sun-addled brain frantically calculating the date.

She’s right.

‘Oh Bibi,’ I say. ‘I’m sorry.’

How could I have forgotten? It’s bad enough being stuck out here in the middle of the ocean on your birthday, but to have your own family forget is terrible. I can see from Rashida and Omar’s faces that they think so too.

‘Happy Birthday, Bibi,’ I say to her miserably.

The others do too.

Then I pull myself together. There’s not much I can give Bibi for her birthday out here, not even a glass of water, but one thing I can do is try and cheer her up.

‘Let’s plan a party for your birthday,’ I say to her. ‘We’ll have it when we get to Australia.’

‘OK,’ she says, brightening.

‘My birthday’s in four months,’ says Omar. Rashida gives him a dig with her elbow.

‘In Australia,’ I say to Bibi, ‘when it’s your birthday, the Australian government comes round to your house with a cake and fizzy drinks.’

I’m not completely sure if this is true, but with a kind and caring government it could be. Anyway, it’s the thought that counts.